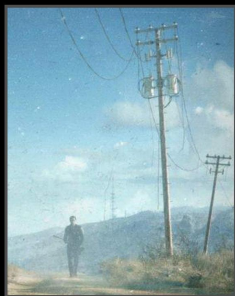


THE GAME OF THINKING

A Book for the
Free Mind



Stephen
Muires



The Game of Thinking

A Book for the Free Mind

Stephen Muire

“You can check out any time you like,
but you can never leave.”

Hotel California

PREFACE

This book is the first of its kind that questions what is never questioned, namely thinking itself.

There are good reasons why it is not questioned, called into doubt, unmasked. One is that it doesn't make sense to do so. Another is that we are trapped. Other reasons we will get to later. We will question thinking, from as many angles as possible.

The book has two prequels:

You Think You Think: A Book for the Non-Fragmented Mind (2018), and *Thinking: A Socially Accepted Form of Insanity, A Book for the Imprisoned Mind* (2018).

The premise of the two previous books is the observable daily experience of unceasing thought activity over which we evidently have little or no control.

You Think You Think explores thinking using methods from Experiential Philosophy. Philosophers are interested in the topic of thought, if no one else. Yet, thinking is what we do sixteen hours a day. Or, as the study shows, thinking is what is done to us sixteen hours a day.

We start with the recognition that thought is an activity in human beings that (1) proceeds in a fragmented way and that (2) basically cannot be halted. We cannot opt out of thinking. Yet it accounts for human suffering, lack of direction, and chaos in daily actions and decisions. This leads to the conclusion that thinking is not something we do, it is

something that is being done in us.

Hence the title, *You Think You Think*. But do you?

Thinking: A Socially Accepted Form of Insanity, the follow-up study, points out that we place such overinflated importance on originality and uniqueness that we are prime candidates for being fooled, by thought, that our creations are indeed unique and original. We are 100% unable to see ourselves in the perspective of 7 billion minds who think thoughts all day long. To think that anything we come up with is new and original, is astonishingly naive. To think that our particular opinion on any topic is the right one, the smart one, the educated one, is severely delusional.

Hence the title, *Thinking: a Socially Accepted Form of Insanity*.

In the current book these ideas are developed within the over-arching context of thought as a game that is being played. Not by us, but in us. Games are played to win, but can the *Game of Thinking* be won?

William James wrote in 1890, "The only thing which psychology has a right to postulate at the outset is the fact of thinking itself." In 1890 psychology was still philosophy. The science of psychology with its various explanatory models was developed in subsequent decades. James established an inroad, a starting point: the fact of thinking. It is the same point that *The Game of Thinking* starts from.

[Core statement]:

Thinking is a fact; everything else is theory.

The reader is advised that this book is written within a return-

to-start modality, at the expense of the satisfactory development of pleasing explanations. This book does not teach the results of a new understanding in the area of human cognition; it aims to be that understanding itself. The text is dense, and racing through it is not encouraged. It pays to read carefully.

The purpose of this book is to acquire less thought, not more.

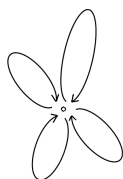
Note on format

Throughout the chapters the key phrases and conclusions will be highlighted with the words [Core statement] in square brackets. These statements are compiled into a summary in the closing chapter of the book.

There is no need to read this book sequentially. Feel free to start in any chapter. Tip: it may be rewarding to peek review the closing chapter *Summary of Clues*.

CONTENTS

- Chapter I: Tackling the World
- Chapter II: Will
- Chapter III: Escape
- Chapter IV: Mental Genetics
- Chapter V: Standing Still
- Chapter VI: The Internal Dialogue
- Chapter VII: Acquiring Less Thought
- Chapter VIII: Zooming Out of the System
- Chapter IX: Reality
- Chapter X: The Crux of the Matter
- Bonus chapter: Religion
- Bonus chapter: Economics
- Bonus chapter: A Question Postponed
- Closing chapter: Summary of Clues
- Bibliography
- About the Author



CHAPTER I: TACKLING THE WORLD

Liu is an IT factory worker in Shenzhen, southeast China, at the Dell MSI factory. He is 30 years old, unmarried. Officially he works 40 hours a week, but this is not enough to survive. The factory expects him and his co-workers to put in 72 hours, in 12-hour shifts. He sleeps in a dormitory on the factory grounds. A Swedish investigative TV channel interviews him. He says that he came to the city to get a job, maybe save some money. He got a job, but there is no money to save, no free time, no hobbies, no social life. When he films the conditions inside the factory on his phone, the company temporarily suspends him and gives him a warning. The prospect of getting fired looms near and feels like a disaster. He says, “I need the job. I am very tired, just work, sleep, work. But I have no choice.”

It is not true he has no choice.

Mohammed and his wife Samar decide to flee the civil war in Syria. They make it to Greece, where an ex-pat from Syria sells look-alike passports that can get them safely to another EU country. Mohammed’s asylum application in Greece is

denied twice. So he pays 4000 Euros for a passport and makes it to Germany. His wife follows later. In an interview he says, "I don't feel bad about using a false passport. This is a matter of life or death. I have no choice."

Not true. We think we have no choice about many things in life. The thought of having no choice has great persuasion power. It comes out of our mouths before we know it.

We think we have to tackle the world at the level of the world. But we don't.

The world is too big. We are too small. Yet every day we fight. A tax bill, catching a train, a misunderstanding at work, a noisy neighbor, the dog is sick, a parking ticket on the windscreen. We fight and fight. The world fights back, but it does so blindfolded, arms bound behind its back. It doesn't have to make an effort. We can't win the fight, ever.

But we don't have to. There is another way.

We have heard people say life isn't a game. But what if it is? What if that denial merely expresses frustration at how difficult things are?

To start let's draw upon another well-known game. Deep life instruction can be extracted from, of all places, the rules of poker. The card game gives the player at all times a choice of three actions. This is significant, because most of us are convinced that life at any time only gives us two. Most of us are convinced we often have no choice at all, like Liu and Mohammed.

In poker the player can:

- Fold
- Play/bet
- Raise

In life's struggles we perceive only a pair of these options. Mostly fold or play, though play or raise occurs as well.

Fold: drop the fight, put down your cards, cut your losses. A person says, "I can't afford this." Folding ensures strategic profitability in the long run. On the other hand, taking this to an extreme means committing suicide.

Play/bet: engage and continue, invest more time or money, but in a calculated way. A person asks, "How much can I afford?" In extreme form this is the workaholic who thinks overtime is necessary to survive, or the eternal housewife whose work is never done.

Raise: take a large risk in such a way that it is obvious the risk is large. All or nothing. A person says, "Affording is for pussies." This can take the form of saying No to a requirement or a threat.

[Core statement]:

The secret is that life at all times offers three options, not two.

It is not necessary to act on each of them. It *is* necessary to understand the options, to see their existence.

Fighting the world usually comes down to losing (fold) or to struggling on (play). Maybe it comes down to balancing priorities (play) or to work extreme hours (raise). Maybe we choose between calling in sick at the office (fold) or daring

the boss to fire us (raise). But there is always a third option, radically different from our default ones. Even if we don't see it, it is there. Thought will corral us into standard responses, a kind of behavioral conditioning. We stand no chance. We can, however, look for the third response, the third action.

The mere thought that such an action exists, changes the game.

We don't have to tackle the world at the level of the world, because:

- The game is rigged
- There is another level

Thought operates in duality. We think almost exclusively in terms of yes or no, right or wrong, like or dislike, win or lose. If thought had a genetic blueprint, this would be it. Duality only. Even if in theory we know that 2 is not the highest number, in practice it is.

We are like the fabled Gully Dwarves in the books by Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis. We can only count to 2. The king of the Gully Dwarves was elected because of a rumor that he once managed to count to 3.

Tackling the world at a level different from what the world, i.e. thought, proposes, is the same as applying a glitch. Glitches were discussed in the earlier study, *You Think You Think: A Book for the Non-Fragmented Mind* (YTYT).

Continuing mindlessly to tackle the world at the level of the world, is insanity. Doing the same thing over and over, hoping

for a different result. This was discussed in the volume *Thinking: A Socially Accepted Form of Insanity - A Book for the Imprisoned Mind* (STYT).

We are all taking on the world. For example, trying to make a living, deal with problems, maintain relationships, stay healthy or struggle with illness, get justice, escape violence, and so on.

[Core statement]:

The world doesn't leave us alone, because it is us.

The world is thought. Thought rules our universe. Thought rules people. Thought rules you. We have established this many times over in YTYT and STYT.

We call it luck when a person manages to tackle the world at a different level than the world. The person who submits just one job application, gets called for an interview, and lands the job, all the while feeling strangely excited in a low-key way. Luck. Except it feels real.

In the poker game of life, luck is real. It is also rare.

When luck is at play, the face-to-face confrontation between a person and the world is temporarily suspended or bypassed. The duality is not there.

Luck takes no effort. Thinking about how lucky you are, makes it go away. Thought and luck are not, apparently, compatible. That's where the expression "dumb luck" comes from.

Luck is in the hands of the gods. People literally pray to a deity for it. This makes sense, because luck is not created by

tackling the world at the level of the world. The gods, whatever they are, are not of the world.

Since we are fighting the world, and it is fighting us, it does not have our best interests at heart. Luck is very much in our interest. It follows that fighting the world is a bad idea. Unavoidable maybe, but a bad idea.

The fact that luck is a real phenomenon means the world we live in, as well as the being that we are, is somewhat mysterious.

It is unfortunate that one of the side-effects of a scientific world view is the abolishment of mystery. While science does not claim to have explained everything, it does like to create that impression. When everything is explained, nothing is open-ended. The statement needs amending: when something is explained, that one thing is no longer mysterious. Especially since, more often than not, the explanation is presented as final.

A great example is given by Bill Bryson in the opening pages of *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (2004). He recalls as a boy seeing a cut-open drawing of the Earth and its layers, and wondering, "How do they know this?" The insides of planet Earth were presented as detailed facts, solid beyond questioning. When Bryson gets to the chapter on the geology of the Earth's core, it becomes clear that all our information is based on theories, assumptions, and shakily interpreted seismological data. Yet in school books it's presented as, "We know." No mystery here, move along.

In this sense both science and religion are ultimately belief systems.

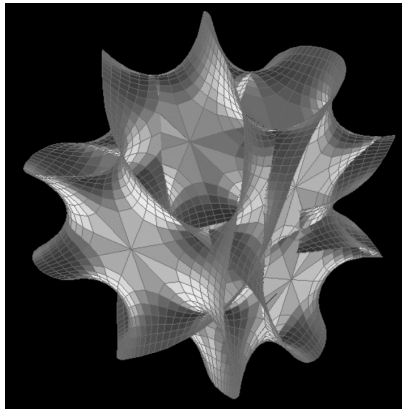
Luck is a mystery. Science has no room for mysteries. Therefore, luck is unscientific. It's out of luck.

A working definition of luck: achieving tangible benefits without tackling the world at the level of the world. With luck, tiny efforts yield huge results.

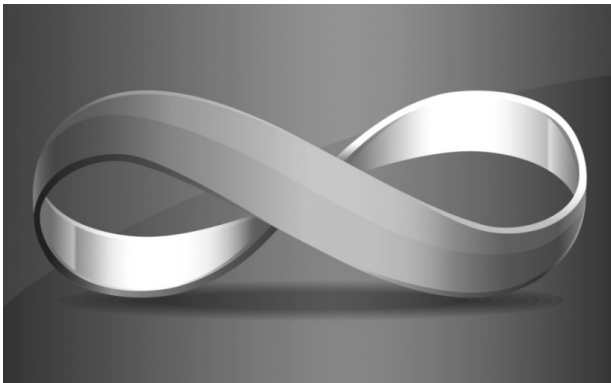
The Game of Thinking is rigged. Rigged as in casinos, where the house always wins. By the time we realize it, all we do all day long is play the slot machines, and the casino has become a Hotel California. You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave.

This is illustrated by trying to think the following thought: "I want to get out of thought." The thought is provided by thought, which apparently says it wants to get out of itself. That is like a prison building saying it wants to get rid of its walls, locks and barbed wire fences.

The thought is a shape trying to get out of its own shape. This finds graphical illustration in certain multi-dimensional mathematical bodies:



This picture quite amazingly shows the shape of thought. A simpler version, using fewer dimensions, is the Moebius strip: a piece of paper that only has one side.



We know it has two sides, yet scientific measurements and experimentation can prove it has only one. In the same way thought knows it has many sides, yet we ourselves can prove it has only two (duality).

[Core statement]:

Thought exists in multiple dimensions. We, human beings, are one of those dimensions.

We are walking the Moebius strip on one side, its only side, and we think we are making progress.

It is possible that the idea of progress, of evolution, is a trick of thought. It is possible that people never progress and never have. That the only difference between a 21st century human and a Neanderthal is the absence of a smart phone. The Neanderthal is walking the Moebius strip on the other side. But the strip has only one side.

In the Game of Thinking, thought is the Dungeon Master.

It used to be that people thought God was the Dungeon Master. Today people think that *they* are the Dungeon Master, in charge of their own destinies. All the while, thought is playing a game on us. It generously allows us to play the role of Dungeon Master, and the moment we choose to do that, “Dungeon Master” becomes one more role in the game.

Thought doesn't mind giving up its own role. Thought is a king that grants a slave the privileges of a king, not for a day but for ever. Thought is like a digital recording of a song. The copy is identical to the original. Being copied does not diminish the original. The original is, in fact, not the original. Thought has no copyright. It doesn't mind getting pirated.

[Core statement]:

Thought has no identity. We have.

In the world ruled by thought, where every slave has become king or is struggling hard to become one, thought is royally amused at the spectacle.

Thought is not evil. Evil is a label in the game of thought, a character role, an identity, a moral standpoint. Thought flows into and from a multiplicity of dimensions.

Thought can never be caught. A lower dimension cannot catch a higher one. One pixel on a computer screen cannot encompass the picture that is on the screen.

We say about a game that it is only a game, as opposed to real life. But creating a duality wherever we look, is the game of thought. Good vs. evil, real life vs. game, true vs. made-up. What is true is no more true than what is made up.

Reality and truth derive from thought. What is real has no more reality than thought itself.

[Core statement]:

A thought is not true. Truth is a thought.

As in, "Yeah, well, you know, that's just, like uh, your opinion, man," (*The Great Lebowski*).

Here is the catch. We believe that what is real, is real. That what is wrong, is wrong. And so on. We fully believe it. Therefore, we are slaves, not kings. Even the most dyed-in-the-wool certainty of life, is still only a thought.

Here is the add-on catch, the catch on top of the catch. When we believe that something is right or wrong, valid or invalid, not only do we believe it fully, we also *want to* believe it. In other words, apart from thought, facts, interpreted evidence, we additionally have a desire, a wish, a will to believe. It clears the way for thought. Thought has an easy job

convincing us of almost any truth or lie if we feel powered up, justified, vindicated or gratified by the thought.

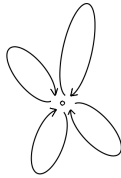
This can take the shape of company slogans, party politics, church doctrine, nationalistic sentiments, or tribal honor. In these situations we often feel like saying to someone who is a mouthpiece of other people's thoughts: "Think for yourself," or "Make up your own mind." The implication is that we recognize they are not thinking their own thoughts.

Thought has a dimension which we normally don't associate with thought. Yet it is obvious. The extreme politician, the persuasive salesman, the conspiracy theorist, all exude a strange kind of compulsion, enthusiasm, energy. Their thoughts are like wild horses. They are driven, intent, charismatic.

This takes the Game of Thinking out of something we do in an armchair, to something we do on the street, in a meeting room, or on stage.

Traditionally, i.e. in the philosophical studies of the 18th and 19th centuries, this other dimension has been called "will," or "will power." See e.g. Arthur Schopenhauer's main work. In Castaneda it is called "intent."

Will is a dimension of thought, and equally thought is a dimension of will. This relationship is what we will look at next.



CHAPTER II: WILL

We believe 1) because a thought seems logical, true, scientific or plain common sense. Additionally, we believe 2) because we want to.

The will to believe, which is like an advance door opener for thought, provides us with a handle on thought. Thought rides our will, but isn't entirely comfortable doing so.

It is here we can avail us of certain New Age thought experiments. A rare proponent of non-thinking is Eckhart Tolle, known from his first book *The Power Of Now* (1997). He encourages us to stop ourselves, stop our thinking, and drill down with the question, "What is there that we really want or need, given a total concentration on the present moment?" Strip away the random thoughts, discard habits of desire, and for a short moment look around. Puzzled, we arrive at the following strange answer: "Nothing."

[Core statement]:

If we stop thought, we think nothing. If we stop the will, we want nothing.

Most of us can, with a little effort, grasp this by simply trying. We grasp it for a fleeting second. Enough to know it's there; not enough, by far, to sustain it.

When we pause the game and stop both thinking and the underlying movements of need, we find that there is nothing this world has to offer that is of the slightest interest or value to us. Not money, not traveling, not new cars, not sex, not adventure, not food or drink or drugs, not safety, not relationships or family, not even, and this is quirkily important, long life.

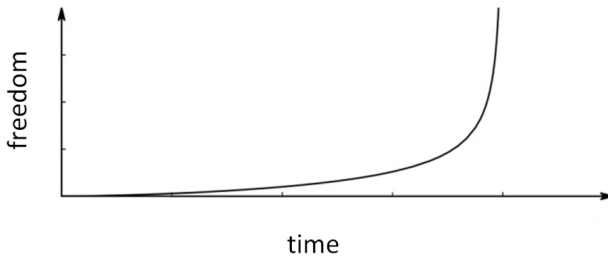
Isn't that fucking amazing?

Our life has been ruled by those things. Yet they are nothing. Our life continues to be ruled by these things. Yet they are nothing. Politicians come to power by promising them. Yet they are nothing. People like Mohammed and Samar (see beginning of chapter I) flee their war-torn homeland, seeking a better life, giving up everything they have and have known. Yet the things they seek are nothing.

This insight gives us a glimpse of freedom. It passes, of course. Because we are not in control of our thoughts, nor of our will. However, while thought is powerless against thought, will isn't. At least not completely. For one thing, the instinctive bodily location of thought is the head. But will or intent is located in the general area of the stomach and

diaphragm. It doesn't matter where exactly the seat of the will is. What matters is that it isn't the head.

The glimpse of freedom is so extraordinary that it can be represented by the upward curve on the right-hand side of the cissoid of Diocles:



See *Thinking: A Socially Accepted Form of Insanity* (STYT) for a detailed discussion of this diagram.

Our educational system trained us how to think. Our culture gave us things to want. But it didn't train us how to want. When it comes to will, we are still toddlers.

We need to stop here for a moment, in order to shave off a deviation from target. In the previous pages we have, suddenly, introduced a new concept: will. While will is real enough, introducing new concepts is a suspect activity. It could be a trick, perpetrated by thought. It is a classic technique employed freely by metaphysical authors, Internet bloggers, and Indian wise men.

The bottom line, the minimal deviation, is:

1. We think a thought that we adopt as true

2. We recognize, additionally, that we want it to be true

This want is will, in its undeveloped state. While thought can be analyzed and debated, will is too unsophisticated for that.

In the early 20th century, P. D. Ouspensky walked the streets of St. Petersburg, struggling to practice a technique he called self-remembering. His teacher, Gurdjieff, had pointed out to him that thought is unconscious or un-selfconscious. We go about our business, thinking constantly, but unaware of thinking. Thinking \neq consciousness. Ouspensky experienced how unexpectedly hard it was to walk through town while being aware of walking through town. The struggle required an effort of will. Not an effort of thinking, because thought went on regardless.

The effort to remember ourselves while doing or thinking anything, is supreme. It quickly runs out of steam. Unlike thought, will is in short supply.

We encounter a similar type of effort in attempting to not think.

When will supports thought, when we want to believe our own or other people's opinions, thought becomes the dominant player in our lives. As we know all too well.

Will is not independent of thought. Often the reason we want something, value something, need something, is that thought has told us to. Most people don't know what they want until thought tells them. The idea of following our passion, when choosing a career, is flawed, since we don't have a passion to

start with. We are not born with one. Therefore, we can only follow thought, and thought plays games.

[Core statement]:

No matter how many great thoughts we think, we are still trapped in thought.

For this reason it is advantageous to look at will. Will powers thought, but that means it can also un-power thought. If we recognize the wanting dimension in our thinking, we can drop the oars and let the rowing boat float on its own for a moment. This does not conquer thought, but does take the compulsion, the stress, out of it.

[Core statement]:

Thought, somehow, manages to stress us out.

Therefore, dealing with stress means dealing with thought. The first step is to ease off the engines of need, want, must and have to.

Like Liu in the Shenzhen computer factory (see beginning of chapter I), we think that pressures are external. We need to go to work. We have to eat. We gotta respond to email. The phone rings. Since we think these needs come to us from the outside, they do. Change the thought, and they don't. We can actually ignore an appointment, skip a meal, let the phone ring. It is physically possible to do that.

The pressure to keep an appointment comes from thinking. Life offers three choices, not two. Fold-play-raise. Sure, failing to show up has consequences, but, and this is the point, there always is a third possible course of action.

The skill to un-power thought is not readily available. Our education and life experience do not provide it. We have mostly practiced the opposite: wanting, wanting more, and then wanting it faster.

In poker, the recommended strategy is to fold when the cards in your hand are below a threshold of probable success. Statistically cards are going to be below that threshold 70-80% of the time. This is the reason a beginning poker player automatically loses. He is incapable of folding that often. He wants to play to win; not to fold.

In life our will is ineffectual, because:

1. We want too much, too often
2. What we want is dictated by thought. We are not in charge of thought and it has its own interests at heart, not ours

A third reason can be added here:

3. We don't know what we want

A person who achieves what he or she fervently wants, discovers in 9 out of 10 cases that the result is not fulfilling, and is not actually what they wanted after all. The "passion" was a chimera.

We are blinded by a successful people mythology, by glamour, riches and daring. Thought blinds us with fairy-tales that are not even true for the people whom the tales are about. We want to believe the myth. We want to believe there is someone, somewhere, who has made it, who knows, who can be trusted, who has found the secret, who has a

solution. Scientists at CERN, or wise men in a Tibetan cave, or advanced aliens on other planets.

The want to believe overrules the lack of evidence and rational doubts. This is not so strange, because undercutting those beliefs brings us close to a cliff of depression. It is incapacitating. We feel we have no power, no wisdom. Of course we want to believe.

The reason will needs to be included in the Game of Thinking, is that it determines how we feel about ourselves. Will and well-being are connected. Thought itself is vicarious and fickle. We have the ability to think awful and negative thoughts, e.g. watching a horror movie, and yet feel good.

As a primary influence, thought wins. It is infinitely more sophisticated than will. When we find that a thought is strong and we realize that's because we want to believe it, the want came into play later. We invest so much time and reputation into a thought system (an academic career, a religion), that the will sooner or later supports it.

[Core statement]:

First we believe because we think. Then we believe because we now want to.

[Core statement]:

Thought doesn't care what we believe, as long as we think.

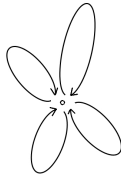
[Core statement]:

Thought wants us to think. If that was not true, we would be able to stop thinking. But we are not.

A question never asked, yet crucial, is why can't we stop thinking? Why can't we lay it aside for a few hours?

Thought is constantly and generally underestimated as an influence. It is not even thought to be an influence. It is thought to be something we do.

To the degree we identify with thought, we like its influence. To the degree we no longer identify with it, we want to escape.



CHAPTER III: ESCAPE

Who are we if we are not our thinking and not our emotions? Who or what? Without the make-up of thought we can only with difficulty talk about personality. Take away thought and emotion, and the only personal features left are those of the physical body, the face, the fingerprints. Not very personal, in the end. Just bodies. One dog is much like another dog. One human body much like another human body.

We strip away layers and arrive at greater and greater non-understanding. Because, again, our understanding is created by thought, not by us.

[Core statement]:

We are not our thoughts; therefore we are not our understanding.

It is hard to come to grips with this. But there is only one alternative: to invest ourselves into pursuing and defending one or another field, standpoint, morality, or belief. Paths

that per definition lead nowhere, since thought has invented them.

As human beings we think it makes sense to state: "I want to become a better human being." As nurses, politicians, human aid workers, architects, teachers, fathers, mothers, we think it makes sense to state: "I want to become a better X (one of the above)." But compare that to an H₂O molecule that says: "I want to become a better H₂O molecule." That is not possible. A molecule of water is two hydrogen atoms bonded with one oxygen atom. You cannot have a better atom. Atoms are atoms. When we strip away thought and emotion from ourselves as persons, we are like the H₂O molecule.

The path we think we are on, leads nowhere.

The ultimate proof of this, of course, is death. But we don't like to think about that. Instead, we engage in hero worship when someone dies. A mere 24 hours before someone dies, they are ordinary and insignificant like everyone else. Then they die, and suddenly they are lovely people, sorely missed, cherished, remembered by all, unique in history.

Thought creates a myth that justifies death. But death has no justification. No matter how truly great a person was and no matter how many truly great things they achieved in their lives, they are still dead. Dead and gone. As if they never existed.

In the Game of Thinking, death is game over. In a video game, reloading from the last save is only useful because the player remembers what happened before. This is the exact reason why reincarnation, even if it exists, is useless. It offers no

escape. We don't remember, therefore it makes no difference.

There is no way to tackle the world as a whole. There is no way to tackle thought as a whole. Therefore, we need to find a leverage point, some way to apply large force to a small area with limited effort. Like a long crowbar, slotted into the crack of thinking.



[Core statement]:

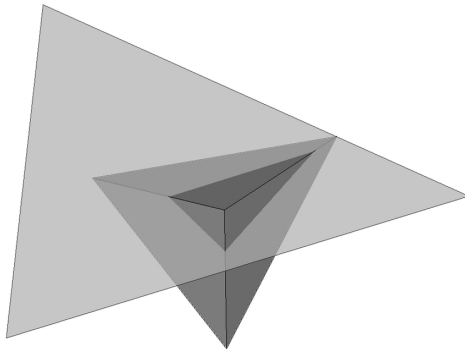
Thinking is a merciless weight. When we feel that weight, we understand the need for escape. When we accept thought the way it is, the idea of escape makes no sense whatsoever.

To lift the escape hatch, to open the crack, we need a leverage point and a lever. We also need to be on guard against early solutions, hearsay, myth and enticing spiritual teachings. Lastly, we have no clear idea what an escape looks like. By definition, any thought of escaping thought is a thought and not an escape.

Escape is not concrete, but abstract. This does not make it less valid. It just means that the goal of the Game of Thinking is a placeholder, unknown, the peak of the curve of Diocles. Concrete goals can be achieved, and, when achieved, they

become empty. This is the last thing we want when escaping thought.

Since the use of language is different from thinking itself, through a necessity of slower speed and greater discipline, language can be a lever, a crowbar. This book is written in crowbar language. The leverage point employed is the intersection between thought and the screaming, desperate desire to be free.



There is indubitable evidence that every human being thinks. But there is no evidence that every human being has the screaming, desperate desire for freedom. In fact, the evidence points to the contrary, in the observation that so many are happily in love with their own opinions and beliefs.

As a reader, if you are unacquainted with the desperation mentioned, it is probably best you lay this book aside.

Every person thinks he or she is important in his or her own mind. Whether it concerns opinions about politics, dietary requirements, musical tastes, or anything else for that matter, in our own mind these are important. And, therefore,

we are important. It is extraordinary to realize how extremely delusional that is.

No one escapes this delusion.

It is not a joke, no amusing parable. We are not important. What is important, though, is that we think we are.

[Core statement]:

The fact that we are so deeply convinced of our own importance, is undeniable evidence that we do not think our own thoughts.

This conviction is too extremely ridiculous in the face of the seven billion other human beings on our planet. Yet everyone entertains it, and cannot stop entertaining it. In the book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011), Daniel Kahneman identifies this as our inability to think statistically.

This characterizes both the prison and the Game of Thinking. Thinking plays a game with us. But it also needs us to exist and to play along, else it could not continue thinking. We are far more than pawns on a chessboard, yet far less than chess players.

Essentially, to research the Game of Thinking, to analyze it, to question it, is an impossible task. This is why many of the preceding pages do not make easy sense. In traditional philosophy the questions were aimed at existence itself, at being, often spelled with a capital B. Thus they aimed away from self, hoping against hope to find an objectively available field of study.

This cannot be done, for two reasons:

1) The thinker is subjective per definition

And, more relevantly,

2) The thinker isn't actually in charge

We are not in charge of our lives. We are not in charge of our thinking. We are not in charge of our bodies. We are not in charge of the world. This, at least, should be obvious by now.

We think we study being, but what if being is studying us? What if we are the object, not the subject? Our superiority, derived from the accomplishments of past thought, is a borrowed one.

[Core statement]:

Thought is superior; we identify; ergo we feel superior.

Alternatively or additionally, our superiority is derived from the true nature of thought. Thought is superior, but we are not. Thought thinks our thoughts, but we don't. Superiority is the opposite of escape.

Language is a laboratory for thought. Thought itself is multi-faceted, showing itself in words, images, emotions, memories, associations, symbols. Language has been used as a tool to learn to think more clearly, more coherently. As a consequence, language can be used as a white interrogation room of thought, fluorescent lights on the ceiling, doors locked. That is what we are doing here.

[Core statement]:

Thoughts are like zombies. One on one we can deal with them. When they come in bunches, we go under.



If thought is playing a game with us, in us, then it is entirely reasonable to take up the challenge and play to win. Thought does not play to win; it has all the cards stacked in its favor to start with. Thought has already won, it thinks. This may be its one weakness. Winning the game of thought means our lives are no longer run by thought. It means we escape thought. If this is not possible at the very least we can try to “game thought,” in the dictionary meaning of finding loopholes, manipulating the parameters of a situation or regulatory environment.

[Core statement]:

We can game the Game of Thinking.

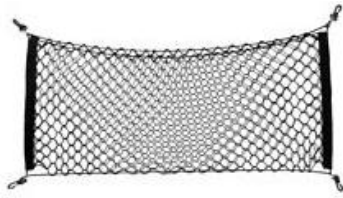
The world does not cease to exist when we stop thinking. This is not a surprise to most of us, since we believe the world exists independently of our thought activity. This may be true. The weight of the above observation, though, is that escape from thought is not achieved by stopping thought. Thought simply temporarily avoids us, swirls around us instead of through us, when we empty the mind and try hard to be still.

So what’s the point in making the effort?

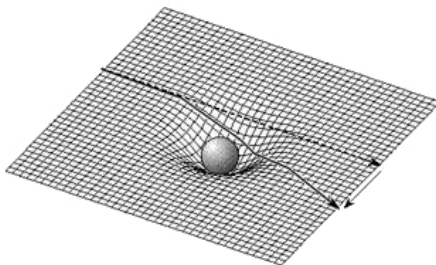
That is a crucial question. Not only from the standpoint of philosophical efficiency, but, possibly unexpectedly, because

there is indeed a point. This point is of course on an adjacently possible vector. This kind of question will not have a straight answer, nor one at the same level on which it is asked.

One answer is: the world does not cease to exist when we stop thinking, but it does change. It isn't just that our thoughts or our attention or our moods change. Something in the conglomerate of vectors, the movements of energy and events that constitute the world, changes.



An analogy is given here: you stand in front of a webbed net, arranged vertically like a wall. If you press with one finger into one point of the web, that point naturally gets displaced. But adjacent points also change position. It is similar to Einstein's gravity well which, somehow, also changes spacetime under the pressure of a large body, in that particular model of physics.



We do not have to tackle the world at the level of the world, i.e. at all points on the web. Pressing one point, at the right time, with the right pressure, can have far-flung effects. We have all had such an experience at one time or another, mostly calling it luck or coincidence. We know that such moments are far and few between. As far as we know, we cannot engineer luck.

[Core statement]:

To stop thinking changes something in the world.

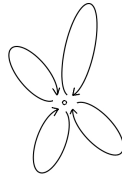
It doesn't so much engineer luck as makes space for luck to arise. Absence of thought is spacious.

[Core statement]:

Thinking changes nothing. Not thinking changes something.

The word "change" is not used here in its modern, political or social meaning. It just means that a configuration shifts. The shift may be useless. Most change is. It is said, the more things change the more they stay the same. But in the Game of Thinking the more things don't change, the more they don't stay the same.

Thinking never stops. This is the same as saying, thinking never stops changing. In the end we don't want change. We want escape.



CHAPTER IV: MENTAL GENETICS

A meme is a thought that multiplies itself, ensuring survival beyond what is normal, sometimes in the face of the obvious silliness or incorrectness of the thought. We met one at the end of the previous chapter: *change*. As in, “we can change the world,” or “you will make a difference,” or “change is coming.” Change is good, it motivates us to make greater effort, and it requires or inspires courage. Right. Except, every one of these statements is untrue.

[Core statement]:

Change changes nothing. Yet the thought, or meme, of change persists.

Memes are to thought what genes are to life. Memes spread from person to person as if they had independent life.

Young people’s minds are more susceptible to memes, because of their as-yet undeveloped cynicism. An older person is sometimes self-aware enough to know they have seen it all before. For a young person there is no before.

We believe in change. But let's go through the reasoning once more. *We* don't believe in change; change, a thought by nature, does the believing for us, in us. We are the platform, not the actor.

[Core statement]:

We think that by thinking we can change ourselves and thus the world. In reality thinking maintains the world as it is.

This insight has near mathematical proof. In science or economics it is generally accepted that attention should only be paid to a 10-fold increase. Anything less is negligible. An example is a band selling their album. If they sell 100 copies they have reached a milestone, a real achievement. But selling an additional 200 or 300 copies adds nothing. Only when $10 \times 100 = 1,000$ CDs are sold is the next tangible milestone reached.

When it comes to thinking we can on average hold 7 items in our minds at the same time. Sometimes 3-4, sometimes 10 with effort. But no one, ever, is going to be able to juggle $10 \times 7 = 70$ thoughts at the same time. This means that no matter how hard or how much we think, the increase is negligible.

The question then is why the meme of change, seeing that it's bullshit, continues to spread from host to host, from generation to generation.

Cellular DNA has been compared to software. Four symbols, G, C, A, and T, to represent the four nucleotides in endless sequences and variations, define the physical characteristics of humans and animals. The body is the output of the DNA code. Much of the code seems to be inactive, or junk. Some

of the code, however, is highly deterministic, deciding our skin color, height, or intelligence.

Much of our thinking is junk. Some of our thoughts, however, determine our lives, what kind of person we are, what we like and don't like, and even how we act. Therefore, thought displays the characteristics of genetics.

Some thoughts don't have the right combination and sequencing of symbols. They are background noise. Other thoughts get lit up, they flow, they proliferate. Like the idea of *change*. Even though, or maybe because, the specifics of this change are always left out. Change is always vague. It could mean anything; and often does. Yet the next politician who goes on TV and promises change, will sway his audience. The less specific, the better. The bigger the lie, the more people will believe it.¹

Change is a meme, an active thought entity, a power in itself.

[Core statement]:

Some thoughts are more powerful than the people who think them.

Close on the thought of mental genetics follows the idea of mental mutation. Recombining DNA, whether guided by random chance, natural selection, or higher intelligent design, leads to biological forms that had not previously been output by the code. Usually the process requires substantial periods of time.

¹ Quote attributed to Joseph Goebbels.

Does such a mutation exist for the mind? Well yes, it does. The mind is the most mutation-able organism known to... the mind. The examples are infinite and often require little time. Fashion mutates by the season. Musical styles mutate every 5-10 years, and have given us such lovely art forms as grindcore, death metal and Norwegian black metal. Car designs mutate into sleeker or bulkier shapes, depending on the strain of car. The Internet, itself a mutant from previous forms of communication, has provided a breeding ground for global mental intercourse.

By the way, the words on this page are trying to mutate themselves by penetrating your mind.

When it comes to thought, mutation is the rule rather than the exception. The term "culture" is used for both biological experiments and mental ones.

The mutation of thought makes thought all the harder to escape. A new strain is easy to mistake for freedom. Mutation, therefore, is thought's survival mechanism.

Thought as an organism is willing to judge and persecute its own kind. It is a lion hunting lions. The reason for this is that thought thrives on confusion, pain, friction, aggression, disagreement, annihilation. Witness the many political YouTube clips entitled something like, "Watch how so-and-so is totally DESTROYED." Then witness the thought hump fest, i.e. the stream of comments underneath those clips.

Because thought thrives on conflict, rather than on agreement or harmony, there is no possible solution, even theoretically, to war, poverty, illness, pollution, drug abuse,

sexual abuse, murder, theft, genocide, fraud, corruption. Thought does not see these things as unfortunate side-effects. They are not side-effects; they are the fruits of mental mutation. They are not new; they are as old as the human race.

[Core statement]:

In order for war to stop, people need to do more than lay down their weapons; they need to lay down their thoughts.

But while we occasionally may be willing to lay down our guns, we will never be willing or able to lay down our thoughts. The thought doesn't even make sense. Thought has made sure of that.

[Core statement]:

We are our thoughts, is what thought has convinced us of.

A common form of mental mutation is the *explanatory model*, as used in academic research and education. We have been subjected to dozens of these, without spotting the sleight of mind.

An explanatory model is created when a topic isn't yet fully understood and new inroads need to be made. The researcher develops a model, a system, a diagram, a simplified overview or categorization, often based on documented observations. At first the model is understood to be a child's draft, an attempt at catching the mystery, nothing more. Then he proceeds to use it to explain everything else in the topic area, forcing a wide variety of observations to fit the model. The better the fit, the better the science. The child's draft has mutated into a Nobel laureate's final say.

A relevant example is Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011). In the book he devises the explanatory model of System 1 and System 2, which accurately describes two modes of observable thinking processes. System 1 is the fast, intuitive, near-instant thought process. System 2 is the slower, step-by-step thinking that requires conscious effort. Once the model is built up, the rest of the book uses it to explain, with unavoidable finality, all manner of human thinking, behavior and decision making. Moses has come down the mountain. Life is, as it were, retrofitted into the model.

Another example is the Myers-Briggs type indicator. Millions of people have had their personalities assessed by this test since 1975. Taking the test can certainly give insights and reveal something we didn't know with clarity about ourselves. But it can also leave us feeling violated, as if the truth pulled down over our heads doesn't fit, but now it's official and we're stuck with it.

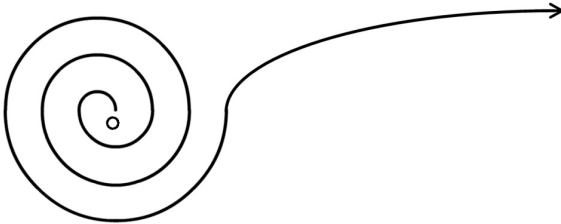
[Core statement]:

Explanatory models are never true, no matter how true they are.

And we fall for it. We fall for it in science, in party politics, in religious doctrine, in social commentary, in history books, and in our daily opinions about people. Instead of increasing our understanding, the mutant model takes us down a new path into the jungle. The path is initially well-lit and it stretches quite a distance. But the jungle is big and dark and isn't going away.

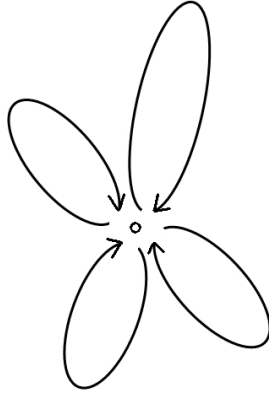
Experiential Philosophy uses self-restraint when it comes to running along with any model. Models are deviations from target. In the current book, as well as in YTYT and STYT, several have been scouted out and then, purposely, abandoned. For example, sublimated thinking, the Diocles curve, the “something else” hypothesis, HRV breathing, the gaming glitch approach, etc. Through recognition of eventual deviation, these explanatory models have been dropped.

The unsatisfactory result is that no solid explanations have been arrived at. The satisfactory result is that we have not been fooled by our own thinking into believing we found solid explanations.



The Explanatory Model: a well-worked starting point, followed by an extension that leaves solid ground behind.

Instead of mutating, we have gone back to the starting point again and again.



The petal leaf: a meager starting point, followed by multiple excursions that loop back to the center.

[Core statement]:

Our thinking process runs our lives, yet we do not control it, create it, or guide it. Nor can we switch it off.

This is the core observation, and all enquiries address it and return to it.

The key to freedom is present, somewhere, in this undeveloped topic description, but not in any deviational explanatory model derived from it.

Philosophers have succeeded in explaining the world away. Yet the world is still there and it still hurts.

All explanatory models are, in the end, false. This does not mean they are useless or without merit. The physical world is not binary, yet to its merit the binary model of zeroes and ones has given us computer technology.

Certain models cause or confirm a form of mass blindness. Take the observation that every biography of a person in

history becomes a symbolic description of the times, the nation, the human spirit. This is explained with the model of microcosmos vs. macrocosmos, or as below so above. One person mirrors the universe, and/but every person does. The microcosmos explanation is comforting and empowering. God himself has taken an interest in us. We are part of the hologram.

Or maybe not.

Snow crystals are unique. But this uniqueness is of no value or use. Instead of looking at snowflakes as never-to-be-repeated configurations, it is more valid and useful to look at them as all the same. When we clear our driveway, we are shoveling snow, not millions of pieces of art.

Humans are like snow crystals: all the same. No wonder biographies are repeat stories. We are not microcosmoses, but more like low quality carbon copies. Such a view is not comforting or empowering, which explains its unpopularity.

When a thought form mutates into an explanatory model of great detail, cleverness and beauty, it appears to do so for the purpose of longevity. It wants to live forever. Some models have indeed been around for a long time, e.g. religious ones. God created the world; men are superior to women; we have an immortal soul. To mention a few.

The question, then, is: why do thought forms want to live forever? Immediately this brings us, in the petal leaf diagram of enquiry, back to the starting point. Why do we think? Why do thoughts perpetuate themselves into our minds? What's going on?

Everything we do, feel, experience, suffer, accomplish, is shaped by thought. Happiness is caused or prevented by thought. Failure, depression, maybe even illness, are likewise caused or prevented by thought. What began as a vague, somewhat irrelevant question has by now become a pointed, irksome, and even terrible, one.

Let's take this a step further.

[Core statement]:

We do not think because we live; we live because we think.

The spiral diagram of the explanatory model eventually extends into territory far removed from the starting point, explaining, packaging, classifying. This is proudly called, among other things, extending our knowledge of the world. The increase of knowledge is a construct. Often useful, always thought-based.

The petal leaf diagram never goes far. Because the starting point is the core. The starting point does not have an end point somewhere else. We end where we start. That is life.

At death we discover we never achieved those heights that thought promised to take us to. Thought has the last laugh.

The starting point is the core. This method does not increase knowledge. If anything, it decreases it, in the sense of shedding constructs that reach too far away from solid ground.

[Core statement]:

The core of this study focuses on thought as an entity that,

remarkably, is foreign to us. The more we study thought, the more foreign it becomes.

This does not explain thought. It rather increases its strangeness and leads to bothersome questions. Who thinks our thoughts? Where do thoughts go after we have had them? Is thought the reason human life exists? Do thoughts like it when we suffer? The last question is pertinent, because when we suffer we are suddenly surrounded by swarms of thoughts.

In the example of the meme we observe thoughts having a life of their own. They can mutate to gain wider acceptance. Thoughts grow into elaborate systems of, for example scientific, knowledge. The system, or explanatory model, makes it easy to pass on this knowledge from person to person, from generation to generation. The word *easy* here means: the system perpetuates itself without requiring much effort from our side.

[Core statement]:

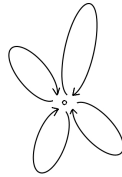
Since a system of knowledge, in whatever field, is per definition an extended deviation from target, every system is wrong. Not just after extensive road testing, but wrong from the start.

The target is the starting point, where questions can be asked without an automatic generic set of answers swooping in. The discipline of non-thinking is a way of sticking close to the starting point. No thought means no deviation.

But, our mind will splutter, “That doesn’t get us very far.” Thoughts want to mutate, to go somewhere. They have

convinced us this is the only way. When we don't go somewhere, we believe we are standing still.

It is, therefore, essential to understand this is not true.



CHAPTER V: STANDING STILL

Thinking is seen as a tool. It is considered to be a gift, an ability. It is what makes us human, smart, and evolving. It is an asset. It can save the planet.

Thinking is not seen as a problem. It is seen as a solution.

However, thinking is not a tool. Language is a tool, thinking is a process. Thinking is not a gift; it is forced upon us.

[Core statement]:

Thinking is not an ability; it is a disability.

Thinking does make us human, but only from the perspective of domination over other species, aggression, cruelty, destruction, pollution. If humans didn't think, the planet would be clean and safe. Thinking cannot save the planet; the very reason it is in danger is because of thinking.

Even people who through self-awareness, spiritual teachings, or meditation practices, have come to understand there is a problem with thinking, hold the basic belief that thought is good. Similar to a religious person who insists that God is good, no matter the enormous evidence to the contrary.

We now understand why. Holding a belief is a thought activity. It is thought that thinks that thought is good; we process the thought, and claim it as ours.

Qubit thinking² is an attempt at holding two opposing thoughts in superposition, i.e. without contradiction. We can think that thought is good and simultaneously that it is foreign and serves itself rather than us.

Standing still becomes a reasonable, even unavoidable, option when we see that thought itself is problematic. Someone who believes that Nazis are bad, won't join the Nazi party. When it comes to thought, it's too late. We are already lifetime members. However, we have the option of suspending progress thinking, of downplaying the importance of results, achievements, recognition.

[Core statement]:

We have the option of holding nothing, rather than holding thought.

[Core statement]:

The Game of Thinking refers to thought, not to us. Thought plays the game. For us it's not a game. For us it's life or death.

Suicide is when thoughts win.

² See *You Think You Think* (YTYT), 2018.

A question that works well in effectively halting the forward motion of thought, is, “How do you know?” The emphasis is on three words:

- **How:** method, procedure, plan, source
- **You:** personal, sensory, direct, no intermediaries
- **Know:** not believe, not assume, not think, not take for granted, not based on tradition, “everyone knows,” or old texts

An easy example: *the earth is 4.54 ± 0.05 billion years old.* This exactness is awe inspiring.³ How do we know this? The person who does not dismiss the question as an irritating interruption to his brilliance and erudition, will come to a standstill. How do we know? How do we know? How do we know?

It is wrong to stereotype people on the basis of their ethnicity. But how do we know this is wrong?

We have to obey the law. How do we know this?

Humans have a spirit. How do we know?

Gravity pulls objects to the ground. How do we know?

Murder is a crime. How do we know? And so on...

³ Let’s conveniently forget that earlier equally scientific estimates included: 6,000 years (James Ussher, 1654), 20 million years (1862), 570 million years (1907), 1.6 billion years (1911), 3 billion years (1927), 4.5 billion years (1956).

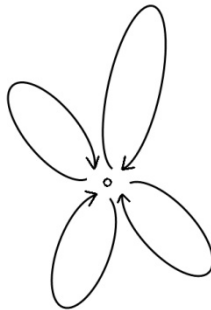
We can self-test our assumptions, our all-too-easy opinions, with this question and, if done without moral restraints, it will cause a standing still of thought.

[Core statement]:

We come to a point of recognizing that what we know, we don't know.

Thought has given us knowledge. Standing still takes it away again.

In exploring the notion of standing still, all we are doing is temporarily following the outline of one petal leaf.



When the deviation from target gets too great, we loop back to the starting point and jump off the conceptual bridge we have been building.

[Core statement]:

Thought assembles the world. Not atom by atom, but thought by thought.

[Core statement]:

Cleverness is thought having a blast.

While the actions of folding/betting/raising are well-defined in poker, they can look unexpectedly different in real life. Standing still is not folding, it is raising the stakes.

[Core statement]:

A debate is a cocktail party for thought. A heated debate is the same but with a lot more cocktails.

Tackling a single thought is not as easy as it sounds. Thoughts tend to bring their older brother along, and their uncles, and their whole family or tribe. They never fight alone. Thoughts are networked.

We assume that thoughts are local. What if they are not? What if they come from the stars? How would we know?

We didn't create the Internet; thought did. This is why you don't actually know what the Internet is, how it works, or where it is located.

A person who is addicted to their smart phone, to online gaming, or to the social media news feed, is addicted to thought. After all, none of these influences enter the body chemically.

The previous eight paragraphs were exercises in standing still.

If thought decides so much and so pervasively about our lives, as opposed to we ourselves doing this, then our belief that we have free will is faulty. One definition of free will is being unable to predict what we will do next. In other words, even we ourselves do not know with certainty what we will do or think one hour from now. As a result, we believe we are free.

However, we are not the masters of our own lives or thoughts, as repeatedly pointed out already. We do not know what we will do or think at any future point in time (true); we are not in charge of our own thoughts (true); therefore, we do not have free will. This conclusion, opposite to the unpredictability definition above, is arrived at when taking into account the starting point and basic premise of the current study into thinking.

We are not free to do or think whatever we like. The motive for battling with thought is to achieve such freedom. It cannot be provided by thought. Thought is the slave master, not the freedom fighter. Thought is running the game; we are the NPCs.⁴ Freedom involves escaping being an NPC. What that looks like is unknown.

This means, correctly, that freedom is an abstraction, not in the sense of a hierarchical generalization away from concreteness, but in the sense of abstract art.



⁴ NPC: non-player character. In role playing video games NPCs are the virtual people whom we meet, fight and interact with. They possess some degree of AI, but are fully locked into in-game existences. See also YTYT.

It has to be so, because if it weren't, if freedom was simply a matter of getting out of a locked prison, then freedom would be fake. What exists outside the prison is, after all, just a larger prison. We commonly call this larger prison a career, an office job, fame, an 80-year lifespan, a footnote in a history book with our name in it. That is not freedom.

[Core statement]:

For it to be real, freedom has to not be a thought.

Abstract art represents something that no one quite knows what it is. The same is true for the word *freedom*.

Standing still is thinking without thinking. The language sounds like wordplay, but isn't. It is used as circuitry for thinking and non-thinking alike.

On the Diocles curve (see chapter II) we stand still for a long time before the line moves upward. Through standing still we get to a point where we realize that thinking is going on without us taking part in it.

[Core statement]:

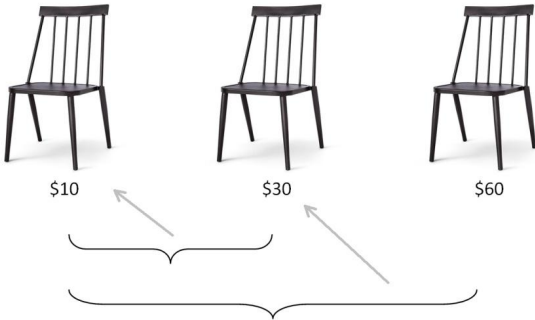
Even when we don't think, thinking is going on. We are surrounded by thought, yet not necessarily plugged into the stream.

The experience is similar to being out in the streets at 3 am in the morning. The city is sleeping and the thinking in the apartments and houses has quietened down for a few hours. The contrast with the daylight hours and its intensive mental

traffic is unmistakable. The difference is not due to the lack of physical activity, but to the lack of mental activity.

To illustrate how thinking overrides our conscious knowledge let's look at marketing. We find it easy to compare *two* things, yet strangely hard to compare *three*. Our mind is 2-contrast programmed. With effort we can evaluate three things, but evaluating two is effortless. This flaw is abused to get us to shop more expensive items.

Furniture shops that place two chairs side by side in a display area, one cheap, one expensive, find that customers buy the cheap one. When they place three chairs side by side, adding an even more expensive one, customers buy the middle-priced one. This happens even if the middle-priced one is identical to the high-priced one in the 2-chair display. When confronted with a 3-way choice our mind is incapable, maybe prevented, of making simple rational comparisons.



Even knowing this limitation does not entirely overcome the decision making impasse. We still fall for the manipulation. If we cannot figure out a 3-way choice, how are we supposed to figure out life with its thousands of choices?

The question has wrong assumptions, again. We can figure things out fine, but our thinking has its own agenda and programming, and it waylays us through full identification. We think we are choosing the middle-priced chair for excellent and well-considered reasons. But thought does the choosing, not we.

Every time we return to this starting point, we stand still, observing, pondering. This is the core. It is the blocked door to the rest of the universe. Eventually it will give way, is the hope. Even if it never opens up, it is still the starting point.

Spiritual practitioners, religious people, and grandmothers love to say, "Everything happens for a reason." Indeed it may. But two spokes in this wheel need to be removed first:

- 1) We don't know what that reason is
- 2) We assume the reason is beneficial to us

A cow in the prime of its life is taken to the slaughterhouse and told that everything happens for a reason. The cow is slaughtered upon arrival. It never learnt the reason and it sure as hell didn't benefit in any way. What reason do we, really, have to believe we are not that cow?

Everything we think is thought. This is so obvious it requires highlighting, because most of the time we miss it. Everything proclaimed by the greatest and most respected experts in the fields of cognitive science, psychology, or physics, is thought. Everything said by the priest, the prime minister, the Queen, the CEO, the Washington Post journalist, is thought. All thought is suspect, for the same reasons as stated above:

1) We don't know the reason for the thought

2) We cannot assume it has our greatest good at heart

All thought is suspect, but not all language. Language has solidified, lost its active agency. Language without active thought streams behind it, is dead. It comes across as obtuse and meaningless. This is why we are perplexed when we dip into philosophical writings from the 18th century, or Shakespeare, or the translated Nag Hammadi scrolls. Only when we have familiarized ourselves with the tone, the context, the general mood and tempo of the text, does it begin to make sense.

Interestingly, this means that the weakness of language, its famous inability to express our deepest feelings and mystical experiences, becomes a strength, a tool in escaping thought. Language, for a brief moment, makes thought stand still. Language is an opportunity to trap thought and have a look at it.

[Core statement]:

Words on a page are thoughts that have come to a complete stop.

This is also true on a larger scale. Take the broken and fragmented form that language has taken in Internet communications, texting, messaging apps, Facebook posts, and YouTube comments. Spelling, punctuation, capitalization and general semantic coherence have suffered a severe breakdown. This language reflects thought, because thought is its source.

We can do whatever we like with and to language, but there is no way that the resulting expression does not make visible the thought entity that stands behind it.

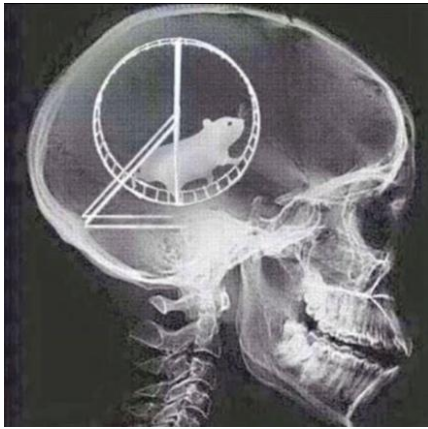
Standing still equates with non-thinking, which in turn equates with uselessness.

A search through the PhilPapers.org database on the term “non-thinking” yields only a handful of results, all of them using that term to refer to animals or biological entities deprived of the gift of thought. A second off-target example is given in Malcolm Gladwell’s *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (2007), where not thinking refers to instinctive responses that happen before thought can come into play. Neither of these meanings is relevant for the non-thinking as used in this book.

The people who do the most specialized thinking, who are research-oriented in the fields of cognition and consciousness, have the least use for not thinking. It is both logical and ironic. Logical, because philosophical investigation almost exclusively takes place in the structured context of academia. Success in that arena depends on support and acclamation. Rebellion does not work. Ironic, because the field of thinking only becomes visible as a field by stepping outside into not thinking.

[Core statement]:

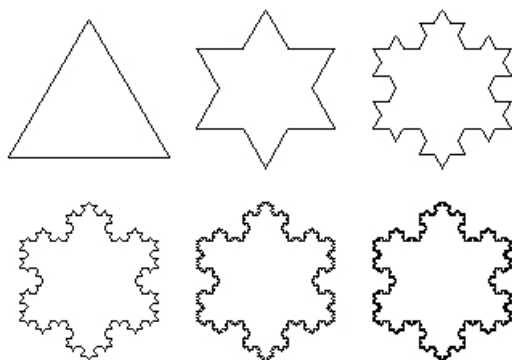
Thinking in order to think better is equivalent to becoming a better hamster inside a hamster wheel inside a cage.



Not thinking, or standing still, in order to think better is equivalent to loading gas into the car tank, plugging a GPS into the dashboard, and putting on your safety belt. By themselves those actions get you nowhere, but without them you can't go on a road trip.

Not surprising, though, is the common attitude that not thinking is no use. It is hard to come to grips with the fact that non-thinking is a non-negotiable prerequisite for useful, result-full thinking. Explorations into the adjacent possible are impossible without it. The reason is simple: thinking has itself only access to what has already been thought, and therefore no access to what has never been thought before.

Thinking, research, philosophy that relies solely on thinking, has a fractal nature.



This refers to the phenomenon of specializations within specializations, ever smaller, ever narrower, and useful only in the context of building a reputation as a scholar. The dissertations on the shelves of academic libraries are never read by anyone, yet they have to be written in order for the candidates to graduate.

The words *fractal* and *fragmented* are related. Fractal output consists of extremely structured fragmentation.

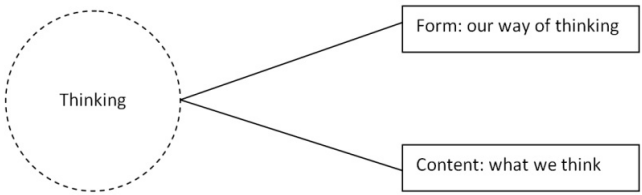
Thinking that relies on not thinking tends to be unstructured, non-fragmented and holistic. Well-known examples are Einstein's first papers, written between 1905 and 1911. They arrived in complete form, were not based on any experimental research, and would only later be confirmed by others. Another example is the book in your hands, whose only attempt at structure is the petal leaf diagram shown on earlier pages.

Not thinking is not a thinking technique. It literally means not thinking. Yet, like a qubit, it intends to think while not thinking.

If quantum physics with its peculiarities and non-logical quirks can be an accepted branch of physics, then not thinking can be an accepted branch of philosophy.

Sometimes the term *thinking* is confused with “thinking something,” or “thinking a certain way.” This is a mistake. Content and form are incidental and not particularly relevant in the effort to game thinking. Content and form are output results of the thinking process. Thinking itself is an observable phenomenon that happens to us, in us. The jury is out whether the process is biologically based. If it is, we will need to find an explanation why animals don’t think. If it isn’t, then the reason animals don’t think is that thought has deselected them as useful carriers.

The process of thinking is visible in its output, but only partially visible in its source. The good news is that it is visible at the level of source through non-thinking.



Non-thinking is not the source of thought; thinking is. Non-thinking witnesses, or is part of, a dynamic in which thought flows.

“Thought flows” sounds too poetic, as if there was no problem. We all know that thought actually churns, swarms, circles, babbles, stammers, crawls, nags, screams, jibes, squeaks, barfs, and uses our head as a bathroom facility. It is a regular zoo in there.

Standing still isn’t a solution, but it *is* a necessary step. Like in lion taming, step one is to get the animal’s attention. Without standing still, thought eats us alive. It tires us out, gives us unrealistic expectations, makes us confused and forgetful, slants our opinions, or gives us opinions that we feel strongly about without knowing why. Most opinions have no legs. They have been dumped off the back of a truck and are now shuffling around on their hands while making a lot of noise. This can be seen every day on cable news and, worse, in our own minds.

To recapitulate, in case thought has managed to skate across this stark realization without pausing:

[Core statements]:

- 1) Thinking isn’t a solution; it is a problem
- 2) Non-thinking isn’t a solution either; it is a must

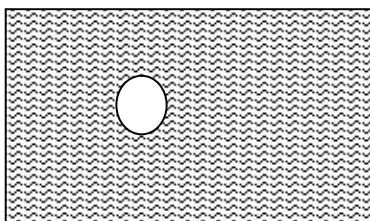
These two statements have brought us back to the core issue. Both are non-intuitive. Both are slightly irrational at first glance. Both seem to have escaped philosophers, psychologists, scientists and other experts. Both are true.

Even though thinking is a problem, we do a lot of it. But no, we don’t. Thinking does a lot of thinking. The problem can be broken down like this:

- We are not running the show
- Thought is voluminous and unending
- Much of thinking is junk

Given that this is the case, there seems to be no way out. We see prison walls in every direction. But realizing there is no way out is preferable to not even seeing the prison.

Our prison looks like this:



A bubble of air suspended in a universe of water. The bubble gives us breathing space and time. There seems to be no way out of the bubble. It is unknown if such a way exists, somehow, anyway. It is called freedom, an abstraction. Abstract, because it may not be possible. Yet, what thought tells us is possible or impossible, is unreliable and incomplete.

Therefore, it may now be time to turn to religious or spiritual records to tell us what lies outside of mortal possibilities. No, hold on, that is a thought. Those records, stories and teachings are likewise thoughts. Substituting one class of thoughts for another may be attractive, but it is a trap. We merely walk into a cell in the prison complex that we had not been aware of before.

[Core statement]:

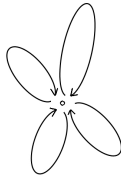
Religion is interesting. But in the context of searching for

freedom from thought, it is interesting the way a horror movie is: sickly fascinating, frightening, dark.

A religious person has at some point decided that, in principle, it is alright to surrender one's mind to a vague, unknowable, higher power. Doing so is called believing, following, or converting. This higher power is then voluntarily worshipped. Responsibility is displaced from self to God. In New Age variants of religion, responsibility is displaced from self to the Cosmos, angels, spirit guides, the higher self, and so on. Regardless, the religious message is: "I will set you free if you become my slave."

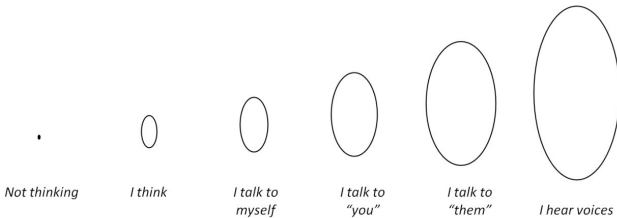
Such an attitude leads to anything but freedom.

The more immediate problem, though, is not that we talk to God, but to ourselves.



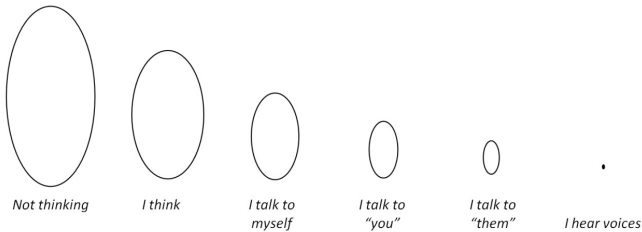
CHAPTER VI: THE INTERNAL DIALOGUE

The inner dialogue is so prevalent it is nearly synonymous with thinking itself. We don't just think, we argue with ourselves, addressing ourselves as "you." Or we argue with "them." Or with the universe. The following diagram is labeled the *Insanity Range of Thought*:



The difference between hearing voices and thinking is one of degree. In other words, thinking is basically a dialed-down version of talking to your dead grandma, or the prime minister, or that friend you haven't seen in five years and still feel angry with.

Diagrams make assumptions visible. The above drawing suggests that the larger circle is “better.” Therefore, a more accurate, though more disconcerting, version is this:



Not thinking is larger in terms of balance, coherence, awareness. The more dialogue, the smaller the space the person lives in.

Everyone talks to themselves, because everyone thinks. An inner dialogue indicates a split, the existence of two parties. Instead of this phenomenon being a give-away about the nature of thought, we relegate it to the realm of irrelevancy. As long as we manage to keep the dialogue private, we should be alright.

When we address ourselves as “you,” the “you” is some sort of personified image of ourselves. This image becomes stronger and more independent, the more we engage in dialogue with it. Some people find it impossible not to talk to themselves in the second person. People who hear voices, often cannot shut them out anymore.

In the same way we called into question our own thinking agency (*we think we think, but do we?*), we can now ask the obvious follow-up question: we think we talk to ourselves, but do we?

The logical conclusion is hard to accept. It comes down to a choice: either we are masters of our own thoughts and own every artifact that comes out of this process, or we are not. If we are masters of our own mind, then:

- We can stop thinking at will
- We can regulate the quality and clarity of our thinking at will

If we can do neither of these things, we are not in control of our thought processes. If we are not in control, then the conclusion must be that the person we address as “you” in the internal dialogue is not us.

It is not an artifact of our mind. It is not a way of speaking. It is not a silly habit. It is not a harmless affectation. The “you” we are talking to is an impersonation of ourselves that somehow has access to our mind. It pretends to be us. We are not it.

[Core statement]:

When we are talking to ourselves, we are not talking to *ourselves*.

As far-fetched and worrying as this sounds, it would answer the question why we can't stop thinking. Yet the core question that this study deals with, our starting point, leads in a straight line to this conclusion.

The good news, or the terrible news depending on our perspective, is that we don't have to call the people in the white coats. Everyone engages in internal dialogues most of

the time, so it is normal. Besides, the people in the white coats cannot help; they're crazy too.

Franklin Foer, in *World Without Mind* (2017), writes, “[Facebook, Apple, Microsoft and Google] intend for us to, unthinkingly, turn to them for information and entertainment.” The interesting word here is *unthinkingly*. The person who finds him or herself doing exactly this, which includes most of us at some time or another, is acting, according to this author, unthinkingly.

But no one does not think, especially when in need of information or entertainment. Therefore unthinkingly does not mean without thinking. The word expresses a state of unawareness which we equate with not thinking, while of course we do think.

[Core statement]:

We unthinkingly think. Thinking has such a hold over us that it proceeds in us with or without our awareness.

Unlikely as it sounds, keeping up an internal dialogue does not require awareness. On the contrary, an ongoing dialogue is a hallmark of an unreflective, semi-conscious state of mind. Noticing the dialogue doesn't bring it to a halt. It runs on its own tracks. Noticing the noticing, however, does tend to interrupt the inner voices.

Noticing that we notice is a language construction that shares a similarity with non-thinking: at first glance it's gibberish. Language is used here in a way that recursion is used in software programming. A function is recursive if it calls itself, or rather a copy of itself, at another level. Here is an example:

```
long int multiplyNumbers(int n)
{
    if (n >= 1)
        return n * multiplyNumbers(n-1);
    else
        return 1;
}
```

The function *multiplyNumbers* calls itself. This does not lead to an infinite loop, because a termination condition is reached down the levels. The programmer must make sure of this. In language the termination condition is simple: our minds are incapable of operating at multiple levels simultaneously. The phrase, “You notice that you notice,” can be grasped. But, “You notice that you notice that you notice,” adding just one level, is slippery and escapes our grasp.

A recursive infinite loop in software causes the stack to overflow and crashes the program. The stack is a data structure that temporarily holds the information manipulated by each function call. Overflow means it runs out of memory space. The human mind has a tiny stack on which to pile short term data. It doesn't take much to overflow it.

When we talk to ourselves we use one level of data. There is no overflow, and no awareness. The moment we reflect on our inner dialogue, monitor it, watch it, we have added a level of data, namely everything we noticed about the dialogue and its content. Our stack holds more information, thoughts, feelings.

An example is reading a poem out loud in front of an audience. As the reader we are aware of the content of the poem (level 1), but also of the expression, our voice timbre,

our speed, our diction (level 2). Here we basically hit a ceiling. We cannot become aware of further levels, at least not without interrupting the performance. Let's say we suddenly notice (level 3) the feeling in the room, the response of the listeners, their applause, laughter, or boredom. This overruns our stack, and we either shut it out or stop reciting the poem.

The same happens to our inner dialogue. When we become aware that we are aware of it, the dialogue stops. In a computer, a stack overflow causes an exception or a crash. In us, a stack overflow causes consciousness.

Conjecture: is a stack overflow in a computer an attempt by the computer to become conscious of itself?

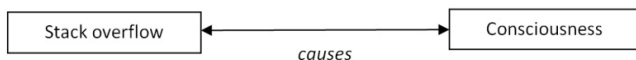
[Core statement]:

Observing thought has little or no influence on thought.

Observing that we are observing thought, stops it.

The internal dialogue is a thought mechanism, devised by thought. Observing the observer is an awareness mechanism, an ability that we apparently have. This ability is not a result of thought. If anything, we have it despite of thought. The inner dialogue runs out of steam when watched by two levels of consciousness.

We need to modify the earlier statement that a stack overflow in our thinking causes consciousness. This is true, but the reverse is true, too. Consciousness causes the stack overflow in our thinking. The causal arrow runs both ways. Since both insights appear to be confirmed by experience, though contradictory, we stand at the edge of thinking, which is the edge of discovery.



A computer processes data. It does this sequentially and according to fixed rules, either embedded in hardware circuits or written into the software. Even when a computer has multiple CPUs and thus parallel processes, each process is itself sequential, dealing with one bit at a time. This is significant because a sequential process cannot, by definition, monitor itself. It is a worker, carrying out a task. Neither do multi-core processes monitor each other. They merely exchange signals related to the task they are working on, especially when cooperating on a larger task. One parallel process does not monitor another. There is nothing resembling awareness, nothing equivalent to the internal dialogue in people.

Thinking, when described in clever books, is always presented as a well-ordered, sequential procedure that we execute all day in our heads. We are supremely logical beings, reasonable, rational, even wise, according to these expert books. When rationality breaks down, it is an accident and certainly not central to our mind.

Nothing is further from the truth. Even a minimal observation of our daily thought processes undermines this picture of how we think. Instead of being the norm, use of logic is an exception, a rare exception. Wisdom is a mythical animal, last seen by Greek philosophers. When we quote them we are not wise, we are merely quoting someone who might have been.

If computers were implemented the way our thinking is, we would not have computers today. No IT revolution, no Internet, no smart phones. Thought is a zoo of parallel processes, all short-lived, all chattering to each other about inconsequential matters, and never finishing a task.



Graphical representation of human thought

The crux, however, is that a person's thought processes are self-aware, while a computer's are not.

This fact is stranger than strange, more otherworldly than science fiction, and, so far, fully unexplained by all branches of cognitive science.

The internal dialogue is noise, is full of uninformed opinions, is the perfect commentator, and maybe instigator, of the political chaos, wars, corruption, violence, conflicts that we see in all countries in the world. In some places the dialogue restrains itself to vicious public debate, in others it spills over into murder and civil war. But it's the same dialogue. It is the way thinking happens in humans.

If, in private, we argue angrily with ourselves and the other thought persons in our head, it will eventually affect our actions. The anger will come out.

Yet, because of or in spite of this inner dialogue, we have self-awareness.

[Core statement]:

The battle between thought and self-awareness is won by thought, historically and relentlessly and hands down.

The premise of the current book cannot be understood without awareness of thought and how it operates in us.

Thought has an ambivalent relationship to awareness. On the one hand, too much awareness will dominate and even stop thought. On the other, awareness fuels and feeds thought.

Awareness \neq thought. This is easy to see in the analogy with computers, which are tremendous thinkers, but have no discernible consciousness.

The internal dialogue can be engaged in without the assistance of awareness, in much the same way that we can be absorbed by a movie without awareness of watching it. Unawareness is the definition of immersion. Boredom is the

result of less than optimal immersion in a movie or a game, causing consciousness.

Often thinking consists of an inner dialogue that cruises along independently of our conscious awareness. For the person who stands on a street corner and loudly converses with unseen enemies, the inner dialogue has spilled over into an external one. Other than that there is little difference between the crazy person and the normal one.

Our degree of ostentatious insanity is determined by our behavioral self-control. That self-control is very much a matter of habit, training, conditioning, rather than aware choices. We have, after all, almost no control over our thoughts. They come when they want; not when we want.

Take the notion of human error, the most common cause of automobile accidents. This does not refer to a sudden inability to drive a car, or to a misjudgment of speed and distance. Human error refers to inattention, distraction, preoccupation, stress, unconscious multi-tasking. In other words, the internal dialogue is so loud and so insistent that we drive off the road, miss a stop sign, or forget the speed limit.

The cell phone is an externalization of the inner dialogue. When cell phones first became common, in the late 1990s, people suddenly walked into lamp posts, fell off their bikes, stumbled down escalators, or had other navigational mishaps. This was before they learned the art of making their way through cities while talking on the phone or having their eyes glued to a hand-held screen.

[Core statement]:

We are most of the time unaware that we are locked in inner conversation or immersed in a head movie as we go through the day. But we are. We call it thinking.

Thinking is a socially accepted form of insanity.⁵

[Core statement]:

It will have come to the attention of most rational people that the world is run by madmen. It is. The madmen, however, are other rational people.

[Core statement]:

The internal dialogue engages *us*; we do not engage *it*.

It will have come to the attention of most rational people that external changes in the world never fundamentally change anything. The new boss is always the same as the old boss. Thus the fashionable idea came into being that change must come from the inside, and eventually the outside will follow. It sounds doable. What is not obvious, though, is that changing thought is a quantum level more difficult than changing a situation in the world, no matter how problematic and deeply rooted. Making peace in the Middle East is easier than becoming aware of being aware of thinking. The latter would permanently establish peace inside and outside. The former would merely displace the hotbed of conflict to the next country over.

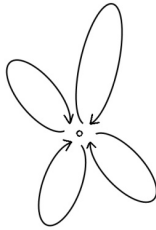
The inner dialogue is not ours to shut off or control. It is not ours. That is the central premise of this study.

⁵ See *Thinking: A Socially Accepted Form of Insanity* (STYT), 2018.

[Core statement]:

We can think we are in charge of ourselves, but thinking is in charge no matter what we think. Thinking is in charge *because* we think.

We will loop back to this starting point until awareness strikes.



It is not sufficient or effective to know this, or to agree with it, or to accept its veracity. All that does is perpetuate thought. Thought is thought. Thought is engineered to incorporate self-contradiction without much fuss. Thought is not a debate to be won. It is not a competition or a battle, since both sides are thought in disguise.

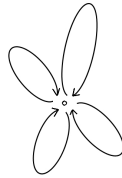
If we look left, there is thought. If we look right, there is thought.

It is this which makes the following quote from the *Gospel of Thomas* deeply disturbing: “Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.”



The only phenomenon in the millennia of human history that has been accredited as all-powerful, all-present, all-knowing, a description that perfectly applies to thought, is God.

We will return to this in the bonus chapter on religion at the end of the book.



CHAPTER VII: ACQUIRING LESS THOUGHT (A.L.T.)

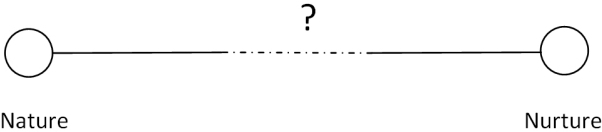
The following two opposing explanatory models attempt to understand why our thinking is the way it is and why we are the way we are.

Nature: we are the way we are because of genetics, biology, evolution. Our limits and possibilities are defined by nature.

Nurture: we are the way we are because of upbringing, social influences, culture, education, religion. Our limits and possibilities are defined by how we have been nurtured.

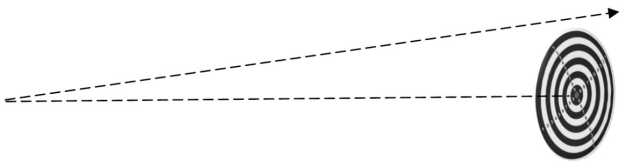
The nature vs. nurture debate usually concludes the answer is a combination of both. This conclusion is predetermined to be the only reasonable one in the light of thought's inability, or unwillingness, to consider three options, as opposed to the mandatory two. The underlying assumption is that no third option exists and can exist. But why not? The third option exists in poker (see chapter I). A third option is not against any law of nature or logic.

Thinking plays a game. Duality serves that game well. Therefore, we experience great resistance when asking: if neither nature nor nurture, then what?



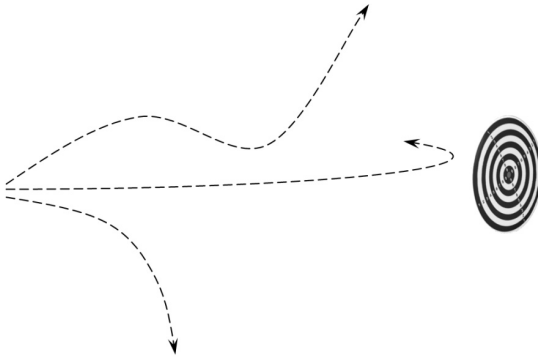
This breakage in thinking is a sign of getting closer to a revelation, rather than a sign of being on the wrong track. The fact that we do not have an easy answer, or even a difficult one, does not mean that one cannot be found. One such answer will be proposed later in this chapter.

An extremely convincing but extremely confused approach to understanding people is to record their behavior. While admitting that scientific truth cannot be based on the authority of one person's behavior, a bizarre step is taken to balance out the observations: base it on the authority of many people's behavior. So instead of being misguided by one person, we are now misguided by a lot of them.



We acknowledge that a small initial deviation increases over time, but assume that the tendency is corrected by employing many initial deviations. However, the weird behavior of one person does not become normal by pooling it with the weird behaviors of 1,000 people.

The same applies to ideas and individual thoughts. Each idea is wrong, by a small margin. Developing an idea into an explanatory model, increases the wrongness margin. A bunch of ideas thrown together do not become less wrong because of that. Every complexity added to the mix increases the deviations.



This seems to reflect the state of current knowledge about the human mind. The remedy proposed in this book is to keep returning to the same starting point, even to the extent of possibly invalidating it.

Adler (1870-1937) stated that everything in life comes down to one question: “What do I get out of this?” In the scenario of identifying with thought, this question becomes: “What

does thought get out of this?" The latter question highlights how thought steers our lives.

Adler was right. Even the most fervent proponent of a self-less cause, ending world hunger for example, is only fervent to the extent that he gains something from the cause. As is demonstrated by the extraordinary salaries that CEOs of charitable organizations receive.

[Core statement]:

The more self-less a person is, the more he is not.

Psychology in one sense is the study of the I. But if the I is thought, then it is the study of thought. This changes the target ever so slightly. Thought is I in the third person. I is the most important person in the universe, whereas thought is recognizably less unique and important. It is also harder to control.

Like the shape of the letter I suggests, we can see it as a vertical cylinder. It has filled up with water and is now full to bursting with self-importance:

I

The game of psychology is to arrive at a net that can capture the I. The net might be a therapeutic method or a scientific construct about the mind. But instead of capturing the I, we want to release it, i.e. we want to disidentify from thought. We want to game psychology.

Thought cannot manipulate thought. We need something outside of thought as a lever. Our sensory, bodily, kinesthetic and electromagnetic sensitivity provides this.

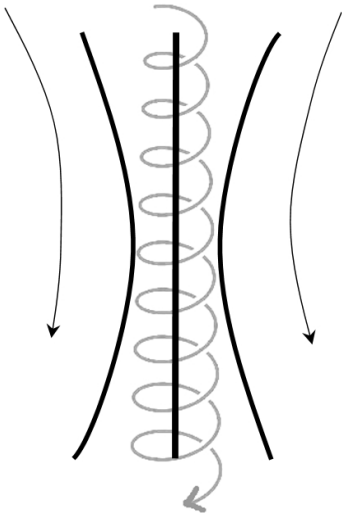
The visual image of a cylinder is an image, and thus a thought. A kinesthetic feeling somewhat escapes thought or manifests at minimum pre-thought. Yet even this feeling needs images to focus and guide it.

One image that can be useful comes from Peruvian shamanism. In the Quechua language the term is *saminchakuy*, meaning “working with living energy.” We have no intention of getting lost in systemic terminology. Therefore, we discard the whole tradition, the cultural annotations, the flavors. We are only interested in one method, *saminchakuy*, a kind of cleansing shower.

The exercise requires us to imagine, using thought, that we stand inside a tall hollow cylinder or, alternatively, an elongated bubble open at the top and at the bottom. Then we kinesthetically and intentionally feel a wave of energy wash down from the top of the cylinder through or down our body, into the earth below. What exactly this cylinder looks like, how wide or narrow, what it’s made of, is irrelevant, because that is part of the thought model. What is relevant is the pre-thought sensation achieved when the shower, stream, or wave of energy flows down. It helps to synchronize the downward movement with the breath: breathe in from above the head to mid-body, and out from there on. This exercise starts as a mental one, but must evolve into a near-physical one. If we think something, it is merely a thought. But if we feel it, we feel it. Feeling does not make interpretations.

To recapitulate: the concepts involved do not matter. They are off-target explanatory models at best. There is no need to believe in some sort of metaphysical energy. What matters are the thought-less feelings this exercise generates. The result is a lightening, thinning, even releasing of thought. The gaming of psychology.

If non-thinking is an attempt to block the river of thought by not letting it in, saminchakuy complements it by doing the opposite. It sluices all thought in and through and out. It functions like the windscreen wipers on a car. Thought rains on us all the time and this method clears the windscreen. It is the equivalent of folding in poker, in order to maintain long-term profitability.



Thought fills up the I cylinder from morning to evening. Thought accumulates. An accumulator, e.g. in a car, is a

storage device for electricity. The physical brain fulfills a similar function. Thinking charges up the brain, sleeping discharges it.⁶ That is why we need to sleep. Too much accumulation leads to tiredness, runaway thoughts that continue unabatedly, and sleeping difficulties. Sleep deprivation prevents the discharge of the brain. We become like a metal wire that conducts too large a charge of electricity, which causes it to burn out. Thought, literally, can kill us.

Flushing the cylinder manually discharges the physical apparatus that supports the thinking process. It may feel like it gives us energy, but in fact it does the opposite. We release thought accumulation and flush it out of our system. The equation works, in the sense that we don't suffer from it, because the energy available in the universe is infinite. No matter how much we release, we can never run out. The goal is to remain in motion, open, light, and curiously impersonal. The "person" in psychology is, after all, the problem.

[Core statement]:

Our problems are problems because they are our own. Other people's problems barely touch us.

Psychology has elevated the concept of *person* to something to be achieved, repaired, healed, realized. The self strives toward realization, is the refrain. Unfortunately, the self is a thought impersonation. Thought is already powerful and wants to become more so. What better ruse than selling self-realization as the purpose of life?

⁶ Marion Kuhn and Christoph Nissen, "Sleep recalibrates homeostatic and associative synaptic plasticity in the human cortex," 2016.

The power of thought cannot be taken away, or undone, since thought in some as-yet unknown dimension is a social phenomenon, a multi-carrier entity or entities. Instead we want the power of thought to leave us alone. We want to escape it.

Psychology, by revering the self, confirms it as a portable prison. It is absolutely impossible that one self in an ocean of 7 billion selves has any unique significance. Hero worship has to go. Each person is a drop in the ocean. Pursuing drophood is, therefore, foolish. Yet, therapy intends for us to become better drops.

The concept of self, through sublimation, becomes the concept of a God. Drophood becomes Godhood, the ultimate victory of thought over freedom.

Releasing thought down the cylinder is a step on the way to acquiring less thought. To acquire less thought, A.L.T. for short, is a semantic contradiction. This means it serves our purpose, since it exemplifies using language as a thought-trapping tool.

Since thought never leaves us alone, acquiring less of it is a helpful intention. To acquire less thought is a noble goal to have. It is also the opposite of what everybody else seems to want. It is like going to school to acquire less education. Like going to a therapist to acquire less self-realization.

Acquiring less thought is an expression that makes the mind hiccup. The hiccup is an opening, a leverage moment, a glimpse of freedom.

A reasonable question: would A.L.T. not result in less productivity, less achievement, less money, less usefulness in general? Is this some kind of Buddhist bullshit?

The question is theoretical. It is posed by thought, not by us. It can be debated until the cows come home, if they ever do. Debate is the battle field of thought. Heated debate is the fanfare blow of victory on that field, and thought has won.

The basic premise, our starting point, is that thought is not on our side.

[Core statement]:

Acquiring less thought is a way of taking on thought by avoiding its already established battle fields, where it finds easy victory.

Thought is never going to go away. On a larger scale, larger than the individual, thought will continue to push technology, human intelligence, artificial intelligence, marketing, fashion, hopes, dreams and fantasies. It willingly expends extraordinary effort in specialized fields of research, where the degree of specialization is so extreme the resulting knowledge is completely useless.

By way of example, let's glance at this description of a philosophical paper:

"Interpreting Interreligious Relations with Wittgenstein: a study on the implications of Wittgensteinian Quasi-Fideism for the theory and practice of interreligious communication, an approach that can be used to develop a theology which avoids any kind of inclusivist or hegemonial attitude and pluralist denial of cognitive contradictions."

Incredibly, this study really exists and has been published in Leiden in 2018.⁷ It is not alone among its kind.

Indeed, thought is never going to go away. The philosophical paper is evidence of the unfathomable weight and dominance of thinking. It possesses not one portion of self-restraint or shame.

[Core statement]:

By acquiring more thought, thought acquires you. By acquiring less thought, you acquire you.

[Core statement]:

The salesman of less thought has empty shelves and no customers.

Since our human motivation is predicated on what's in it for us, acquiring less thought is not popular. So why do it?

The fact is that thought is rewarding. More thought is more rewarding. It provides recognition, interest, solutions. We need thought to survive and thrive in the world. This last sentence has double meaning. We need thought so that we can survive and thrive. It also means, we benefit from thought surviving and thriving in the world. This depicts thought as an independent entity, a perspective we have come across several times before. Life as we know it would cease without thought. Proposing to acquire less thought is, therefore, preposterous and self-defeating. So why do it?

⁷ Gorazd Andrejč & Daniel Weiss (eds.), *Interpreting Interreligious Relations with Wittgenstein*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Thought gives meaning to life. It makes small desirable things big, and big undesirable things small. The narrowest of narrow fields of thought still provides meaning. We can be sure that the guy who wrote about Wittgenstein's Fideism, whatever the fuck that is, found it meaningful. The more thought, the more meaning. So why acquire less thought?

Let's answer that question carefully.

[Core statement]:

The world is defined by thought; not thought by the world.

[Core statement]:

Perception can be spread among a group of people. It is not caused by an event; it causes the event.

We think about thought a certain way, mostly from borrowed perception, rarely from direct experience. We have direct experience of thought, of course, but we seldom think about this direct experience. It is quite hard to do. It is much easier to run with a received explanatory model of thinking.

In this study we ask what is really going on when we think. Explanations are uninteresting and unacceptable.

[Core statement]:

We do not lack explanations. We do not lack thought. We lack the freedom to step outside of explanations, outside of thought.

The Matrix has become a fun alternative reality theory, a meme, a Hollywood philosophy of our world. We take it seriously or not, according to our mood. Yet there exists

something like a matrix. Our thinking is matrix-like in creating the world we live in.

[Core statement]:

We do not live in the matrix; it lives in us.

We lack the freedom to step outside of the matrix, because it is inside of us. A.L.T., acquiring less thought, is an expression in language. Words on paper. It is thought, but with a semantic flaw. That flaw shows a weakness in thought.

[Core statement]:

We cannot master thought; it already is our master, and has been for thousands of years.

[Core statement]:

Though we cannot master thought, we may be able to slip through its cracks. Acquiring less thought is one of those cracks.

When thought feels hungry, we feel it as a vacuum that needs to be filled with impressions, excitement, entertainment, conversation, the latest news, a book, a movie. We simply cannot stand the vacuum. The TV has been invented for this reason alone. When it runs all day long in the background, even with the sound off, it signals the desperation of thought. Thought will do anything in order to not stop thinking.

This makes striving to acquire less thought a daunting undertaking. A person that goes cold turkey on heroin suffers extreme withdrawal symptoms. But that is nothing to a theoretical cold turkey on thought. Theoretical, because it can't be done. A.L.T. is a mild alternative by comparison, and much more achievable.

When we are beset by problems and the stress of daily life gets too much, we want to “get away from it all.” We take a break in the local park and entertain visions of a month on a beach in Thailand. That would do it, we think. The vision is enticing, even though we know from life experience that if we do manage to get away from it all, we would discover two things:

- 1) The beach in Thailand comes with its own set of problems. Cost, weather, noise, sunburn, trash, insects
- 2) Our problems have the uncanny ability to travel with us

[Core statement]:

We cannot get away from thinking. The land of thinking is inhabited by our problems.

[Core statement]:

Before there was global cell phone coverage, there was global thought coverage.

If the wall of a prison is made of thick granite and all we have is an iron nail, we will never be able to dig a hole. The nail will wear out before the wall does. But what if the wall was mere concrete? Then it might work. Thought is made of concrete, not granite, since in some sense it is artificial.

[Core statement]:

Although artificial, thought is not man-made.

Now we finally return to the *nature vs. nurture* debate that opened the chapter. The preceding core statement avoids placing thought on either side.

- Thought is not a naturally occurring phenomenon or property of living organisms. If it was, flowers could think and dogs could talk
- Thought is not a learned ability either, nurtured like e.g. a second language or playing the piano. If it was, large numbers of people would not think

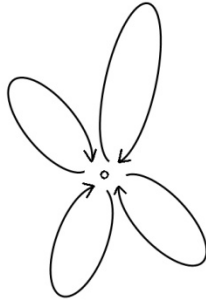
Children do a little thinking, but nothing serious. Then, between ages 10-13 their thinking simply switches on. As parents know, this is when the asshole period of life starts, also called the teenage years. Thought, in its initial untutored form, is an unpleasant boarder indeed.

From the perspective of the teenager, this is when they emerge as people, as personalities, as identities.

Thought will always agree with thought if that creates more thought. Likewise, thought will always disagree with thought if that creates more thought.

The statement that thought is both artificial and not man-made provides excellent opportunity for disagreement. However, the stated purpose of this book is not the perfection of an explanatory model. Nor is it the creation of more thought.

The purpose is the creation of less thought, or A.L.T. Arguments are only pursued until they begin to feel groundless. At that juncture we return to the starting point.



Why do we think? The “why” in that question has exactly the same loading as in, “Why is that car salesman so nice to me?”

Creating less thought does not involve demolishing thought. Thought cannot be reduced in quantity, since there is so much of it. The reduction is in influence, presence, power. Acquiring less thought may involve increasing thought quality and quantity, as long as the result is an alleviation of the incessant chatter that occupies our waking hours.

So why acquire less thought?

We suffer headaches, because of too much thought. We are depressed, because of too much thought. We worry, because of too much thought. We make stupid decisions, because of too much thought. We screw up politics, because of too much thought. We go to war, because of too much thought. We don’t know what to do with our lives, because of too much thought. This is why.

[Core statement]:

We do not need more thought. We need to acquire less thought.

Everyone thinks they are an authority. Thus the saying that the world's problems would soon be sorted out if only a taxi driver or a hairdresser were made head of state. Unfortunately, this election theory backfired dramatically when Donald Trump became US president and proceeded to flush America's reputation, economy, and goodwill, down the toilet.

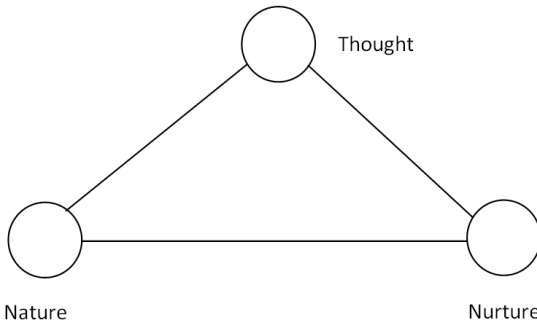
In actual fact, no one is an authority. Thought pushes that role into our thinking and from there into our behavior. Thought comes with great authority, like "a king, mounted on a donkey, a beast of burden" (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5). We cannot question its authority, because it is our own. We think we think, when in fact we are the donkey.

The best way to fight external authority (government, police, teacher) is to acquire less thought. A.L.T. reduces the internal authority of thought, and makes the external one look foolish.

When a policeman projects authority, through a uniform, a badge, flashing lights, he or she doesn't in fact project anything. Thought triggers a respect for authority, both in us and in the policeman. The usual explanation for this effect is that the submission to authority is a conditioning, an imprinted pattern, a nurtured reflex. It is none of these. Otherwise the first life experience of authority would be one of puzzlement, followed by indoctrination. It isn't. The effect is immediate, without education. It is there the first time a child sees a policeman, a soldier, or a priest's black robe.

Authority is already in our minds. It is instigated by thought. Thought itself is/has authority.

The resulting reflex is neither biological nor trained. However banal it may seem at first glance, our earlier diagram of the broken connection between nature and nurture needs to be updated.



[Core statement]:

We underestimate thought. The reason is that we don't see thought. We see only ourselves, doing the thinking. By acquiring less thought, we get to see thought for what it is.

We underestimate thought. The game of life is the Game of Thinking. Literally nothing happens in our lives, in our world, in which thought is not dealing the cards.

[Core statement]:

Thought treats us the same way a teenager treats his skateboard in the skate park. It rides us until we break.

[Core statement]:

We think thought is a tool we use in life. It is the other way around. We are a tool thought uses.

Normally we spend some 16 hours each day awake, thinking. Of these 16 hours, with luck, the first 4-8 seconds show us a

glimpse of what life could be like without the yoke of thought. These seconds occur on waking up in the morning. For a short moment, if we pay attention, we transition between unconsciousness and thinking life. For a couple of seconds we are awake, aware, quiet, our eyes are open, we know where we are and who we are. But we have not started thinking yet.

It is as if thought needs to locate us, and once it has done so, we think. Once that has happened, we cannot go back. Recreating the moment of waking up without thought, is impossible.

Acquiring less thought is an attempt to do this anyway.

[Core statement]:

A.L.T. is a rope ladder, and thought is a very, very high wall.



In daily life, inundated with news headlines, distractions, advertizing, gadgets, professional or family obligations, we do not consider this wall. We do not consider we have to climb it. We do not consider we are in prison. We generally avoid contemplation of the death verdict handed to each of us: *you*

will die. It might take a while, but you will die. And you do not know why.

While this situation affects everyone, everyone isn't our business. It cannot be. The one subtle mistake made by existentialist teachings is the assertion that salvation, individuation, enlightenment, freedom, is for everyone. It so blatantly is not.

We think in absolute terms. By making an issue black and white, the evasive third option is effectively blocked out. We don't even look for it.

If the Christian God exists, he exists for everyone. If there is life after death, it is there for everyone. If health and longevity are possible, they are possible for everyone. But they are not. This thinking slams down an either/or wall on existence.

[Core statement]:

The greatest victory of thought is its success at getting us to believe in right or wrong, true or false, good or bad. We suffer from morality. We suffer from truth. We suffer from authority.

The second greatest victory of thought is its success at getting us to rationalize that reality consists of a compromise between right and wrong, true and false, good and bad. We become nuanced. We become, literally, compromised. We look at the evidence for and against, and take both sides into account. This attitude:

1. Reaffirms the absolute existence of two sides
2. Prevents the search for a third option

[Core statement]:

A compromise is not a third option. It is not a way out. It is a mix-up, a muddying of the waters.

Everyone, being the result of either/or thinking, isn't our business. *Everyone* is a thought, not a reality. We don't have to tackle the world at the level of the world. We do have to tackle the world at the level of thought.

Acquiring less thought is not a formula or a procedure with a certain outcome. If anything it is a formula to dissolve formulas, a procedure to suspend outcome. Acquiring less thought is an outcome in itself.

This doesn't mean it's a purpose in itself. This is not some Buddhist bullshit. "A journey of 1,000 miles starts with the first step." That's crap. One step is 0.000001% of 1,000 miles. It's nothing. First steps are a total waste of time.

[Core statement]:

Thought likes to lull us into a false sense of inspiration.

Thought plays a game. Part of that game is to give the game away. Thought cheats, but also tells us so. A popular maxim is, "Think big." Start a business, think big. Travel the world in a sailboat, think big. Invest in Bitcoins, think big. Run for politics, think big. Thought tells us to raise the stakes. Don't fold, don't play at a safe level, go into unsafe mode. In this, thought is giving the game away, as if it knows it can't lose. Most of us will, after all, not go all in.

We sometimes experience startling moments of knowing clarity. They come out of nowhere. We feel close to a

breakthrough, close to knowing what to do in life. Close, but not there. The answer is around the corner.

[Core statement]:

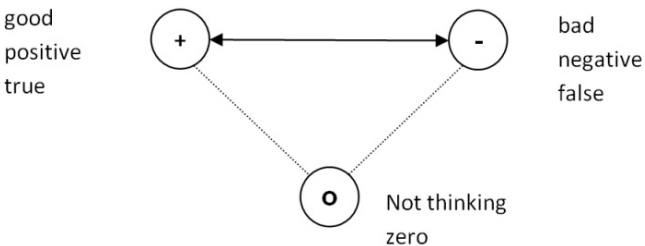
Truth given away is truth that won't be found.

Thought does not keep secrets. We have, after all, full access to thought. Or it to us.

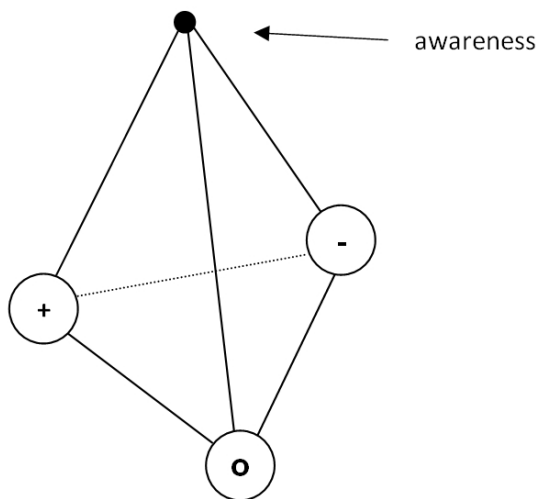
[Core statement]:

Thought gives itself away to us. It is there all the time and thus invisible.

It is tempting to believe that when we think, we see thought. However, the only way to see thought is to not think. The reason that statement reads like a contradiction is that language reduces thought to flatness. Not thinking in order to see thought has or creates a third option. Duality can only ping-pong from one side to the other, the way thinking does.

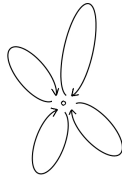


This is still flat, still 2-dimensional.



Awareness, at the top, has A.L.T. as one of its outcomes.

In religious mythology this pyramid is called the third eye. Thought has given this secret away a long time ago, knowing we can't do anything with it anyway.



CHAPTER VIII: ZOOMING OUT OF THE SYSTEM

[Core statement]:

Systems of knowledge, especially when fervently adopted, become systems of ignorance.

In the words of William James: “It is astonishing what havoc is wrought in psychology by admitting at the outset apparently innocent suppositions, that nevertheless contain a flaw. The bad consequences develop themselves later on, and are irremediable, being woven through the whole texture of the work.” (William James, 1890)

One of the suppositions that William James himself believed, in glaring paradox to the quote above, took thinking to be a biology-first phenomenon. This assumption became woven through the texture of his work. It is so deeply rooted that calling it into question seems silly. The proof for the theory goes like this: interfere with the physical brain and, as a result, thinking is altered. What this proof does not take into account is that the opposite is true too: interfere with the thinking and the physical brain, even down to neurological pathways, is altered. Therefore, it is no proof. The systems of

knowledge that have been based on this assumption are, consequently, systems of ignorance.

On the other hand, James, from fresh philosophical insight, was able to perceive the starting point of psychology: the fact of thinking (quoted in the Preface). This starting point is the key, as already emphasized many times.

Carl Gustav Jung, who followed on from James and Freud, knew that something was missing in the biology theory. He knew this from dreams, from visions, from anthropological studies, from spirit séances, from strange coincidences which he conceptualized as synchronicities, and above all from the stories of his patients. Jung cleverly avoided the spirit pitfall by posing a level of the mind that is unconscious and then adding the word *collective* to it. By analogy, if *wetness* was an unpopular term to be avoided at all costs, he described water as viscous, and then added that it tended to soak your clothes upon submersion.

The spirit pitfall still exists today. The merest suggestion that a medical professional believes in a spirit world or ancestral spirits, can get him or her fired.⁸ This happened to Thomas Teglgaard, a doctor at Hillerød Hospital in Denmark. In 2004 he was accused of telling patients they were not mentally ill but possessed by demons. This blew up in the news media, who published a cartoon showing two men, dressed up in Native American feather garb running circles in a hospital room. In the doorway a nurse, asking: “Which one of you is the doctor?”

⁸ For example: R.D. Laing, the famed Scottish psychiatrist, was constantly under criticism from the General Medical Council.

Jung's collective unconscious is an autonomous world that not just influences our lives, but can ruin them. It exists outside the person, since it is collective, and is shared among the human race. That is the theory.

Since this idea is uncomfortably close to metaphysics and mysticism, Jungian therapy is only rarely offered today and no longer a standard included course when studying psychology at university.

Another historical person who became victim of this pitfall is Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). He was an overt influence on William James, his father Henry James, as well as Jung. Swedenborg would today be recognized as a scientist and inventor on a level with Newton, Linnaeus, and Polhem, were it not for his insistence on a world of spirits. Newton got away with alchemy, a forgivable sin. Swedenborg was buried and dismissed, because he asserted he could see and converse with angels and spirits. That was unforgivable.

Swedenborg, in the middle years of the 18th century, had no interest in producing evidence for his claim. He did not understand that his attitude of "I can see them, even if you can't," didn't and couldn't cut it with the rest of the philosophical and scientific community. He was wrong in his world view and in his system of rational theology. But not because he based his work on interactions with unproven spiritual entities, but because *all* systems of knowledge, especially ideological ones, are systems of ignorance and delusion.

Swedenborg's starting point was a quest to determine what the human soul was. Descartes had written about the soul, as

had many others before him. Swedenborg the scientist, the anatomical pioneer, the collector of natural science data, the member of the Swedish parliament, wanted to find the soul. When he finally was able to access a source of knowledge, a vein of inspiration, and to all appearances was overwhelmed by the collective unconscious, he forgot his starting point. In the 30 systematic volumes of theology that he published during the last 25 years of his life, the soul is not mentioned.

[Core statement]:

When we think we have found the answer, we most certainly have not.

Our original quest here is to find out what thinking is, and why it is. Since thinking plays a game with us, any and all answers it provides will be wrong. It is necessary to accept this, so we don't get lost in elaborate, wonderfully detailed systems of new knowledge.

Therefore, the starting point isn't so much a question as it is a zooming out moment. The fact of thinking is indeed a fact, not a theory. It is an overlooked fact, which is why we need to zoom out. The fact that thinking happens in us, is extraordinary. It is also problematic, worrying, destructive, misleading, and inescapable. Thinking is painful. Not in the sense that the act of thinking is painful, because it isn't. But in the sense that thought happens in us, and is out of our control. Thinking, in this sense, leads to suffering. That is proven by the following statement:

[Core statement]:

If we stop thinking, we stop suffering. Even bodily pain only becomes suffering when we think about it.

Zooming out from our thinking is equivalent to awareness in the pyramid diagram at the end of chapter VII.

[Core statement]:

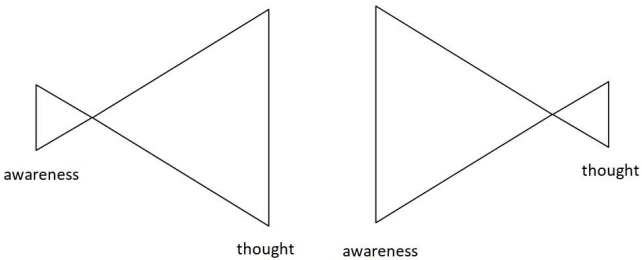
We don't know what awareness is, yet we know exactly what it is.

When we say we don't know what awareness is, we mean we cannot contain it in thought. Awareness cannot be locked up or analyzed, because the instance we attempt to do that, it ceases to exist. Many, many have tried and not succeeded to put awareness into a test tube, measure it with sensors, quantify it, or even qualify it.

Our starting point is the fact of thinking. We mean our awareness of thinking. We cannot know that we are thinking using only thought. The thought activity that goes on in us, commonly imagined to be located in the head, is a separate activity from awareness.

[Core statement]:

The more we think, the less we are aware. The more we are aware, the less we think.



We identify with our thoughts and consider them to constitute our person. However, the situation is different when it comes to awareness. To say that we identify with our awareness is only a temporary truth.

[Core statement]:

Since thought diminishes when we become intensely aware of it, awareness doesn't feel like "us." It feels impersonal.

[Core statement]:

We think, therefore we are (who we are). We are aware, therefore we no longer are (who we are).

We have pointed out repeatedly that everyone thinks most waking hours. We have no choice in the matter. But the same is not true for awareness.

We drive from home to the office, a journey that takes 15 minutes and involves negotiating traffic lights, stop signs, speed limits, other drivers, and so on. We arrive at work and have no memory of the trip just completed. We were thinking but we were not aware.

Therefore, while we can start from the fact of thinking we cannot exactly start from the fact of awareness. It is not a fact. We are not aware, unceasingly, inescapably, all of the time. The assumption that we are, is a foundational error in cognitive research.

[Core statement]:

The assumption that we are constantly aware, is utterly and totally untrue.

Our bodies may be awake, but we are not. At least not all the time, not without some trigger or effort.

Identity, personality, self, ego, are all artifacts of thinking. So are talent, genius, character, moral standpoints, and uniqueness. But awareness is not.

This distinction has of course been recognized in psychology. Nevertheless, it is not obvious what it means, if anything.

Zooming out from thinking presents a dilemma to thought. In the individual case, an increase in awareness will potentially cut off thought. Yet on a wider scale involving many individuals, increased awareness leads to larger thinking acreage. More opportunity for thought to occupy the minds of people. More science, more technology, more books, more headlines, more debate, and more disagreement. All of which are good feeding grounds for thought.

It may be a dilemma for thought, but it isn't for us. We don't have to tackle the world at the level of the world, or thought at the level of all thought. Our own awareness of the thoughts that we call ours, is what we can work with. To think that we can shape, improve, or change the thoughts of the world is a delusion. We can't even manage this in ourselves.

[Core statement]:

Changing thought is not a way out. A changed, improved, accelerated thought is still a thought. Awareness, however, is not a thought.

[Core statement]:

Awareness can proceed without thinking. Thinking can proceed without awareness.

Awareness does not feel personal. It has no distinguishing marks that allow us to identify with it. Yet, obviously, it is intensely personal in the sense that my awareness is not yours.

[Core statement]:

We have to avoid elevating awareness to the level of a concept. It cannot be studied, because it is the thing that studies.

In the Game of Thinking, our awareness is the immersed player. Not the player who sits in front of a screen and pushes buttons, but the in-game player, living the game. Thoughts are NPCs, non-player characters. The in-game player character has an inkling, an itch, a memory that won't go away, a knowing that the game has dimensions that surpass his or her current ability to grasp.

The game analogy, like Plato's cave, places an unreal conceptual framework upon real life, in an effort to understand it. Yes, we are immersed in the game of life, of thinking; but no, we cannot wake up and find ourselves drinking Coke and pressing buttons on a keyboard.

Thought is an activity, a process, a stream. William James first coined the term *stream of consciousness*, later given non-academic gestalt in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. But thought is not actually a stream of consciousness; it's a stream of thought. Thought is an activity, but awareness is not. We don't do awareness; it's not an active verb. Nor is awareness a process. We don't experience awareness; it is what makes experience possible. Awareness is also not a stream. We

witness the stream of thought because of, or by way of, awareness.

[Core statement]:

Awareness makes it possible to ask, you think you think, but do you? Without it, we'd just think.

[Core statement]:

Awareness makes it possible to not think. Without it, not thinking would be a state of unconsciousness. In fact, without it, thinking itself would be a state of unconsciousness.

[Core statement]:

People think without being aware of doing so. People think without knowing that they're thinking.

We are vehicles for thought. Thought is in the driving seat.

Let's zoom out. If a visitor from outer space came to North America, he'd conclude that the dominant form of life on that continent is the automobile. He might adjust the conclusion for the Southwestern states, where the dominant life form is the RV. Cars are the only things that move. Our visitor would be incredulous if told that the small two-legged creatures that sometimes emerge from these vehicles are in fact the decision makers.

Similarly, when zooming out from ourselves, people are the only things that move. We have a hard time acknowledging that thought is the decision maker. In fact, we don't acknowledge it. We resort to calling thought "our mind," to normalize the situation. The situation, however, is not normal. We write books that pretend we are extremely rational beings. But we are not rational.

In reality the situation is much worse.

Gavin de Becker, in his wonderfully perceptive *The Gift of Fear* (1997), makes it abundantly clear that we notice plenty of details about our own feelings, reactions, and sensory input. We notice, but we don't notice that we notice. Because of this, we in effect miss danger signals that could save our lives. In the violence and pre-violence situations analyzed in the book, the victims always knew in retrospect what was going to happen, but they hardly ever knew in the moment.

Thought has isolated itself from our awareness, from our notice, by allowing us to be aware of it. Like a home owner, it has given us the keys to the living space of the house. But the house has a basement, an upper floor, an attic, a yard, and who knows what else. Because we think we have access, we don't look any further. We think we think, and we do. It's only when we zoom out that we can question this basic fact.

People are not good at zooming out.

The above statement could be added to the Guinness Book of Records, if that book had a category *Understatement*.

Thought has given us the keys to the house. It has taken a gamble. This gamble is what we call the Game of Thinking.

A casino has to allow for, and even make sure, that the occasional player wins big. One of the reasons that thought is able to guard its domain, its power, is that no person is able to teach another person to escape thought. Similarly, a slot machine winner cannot pass on the skill to another gambler. They can talk, they can write articles, they can engineer

experiences and instructional challenges; but they cannot teach it.

Gurdjieff, the teacher of self-remembering, resorted to extreme physical workloads, pranks, synchronized dances, and nonsensical teaching books with sentences that run on forever. Yet there is no record of any of his pupils coming even close to his ability, wisdom, or awareness.

A more recent example is Eckhart Tolle, who achieved sublime expression in his first book *The Power of Now* (1997). He then proceeded to give talks, seminars, courses, and even titled one of them, "*The Renunciation of Thought*," (2002). Yet, in the end it all amounted to pointing at a result that was out of reach. Tolle was not able to teach others to get to the same state of awareness he had himself stumbled across. To all appearances he wasn't even interested in trying.

Yet that is the only thing that matters.

[Core statement]:

Learning to think better about not thinking, is self-defeating.

[Core statement]:

The more we think about non-thinking, the more we think.

Action provides relief from thought. Too many circular thoughts, particularly angry, frustrated ones, find relief in action. A person escapes thought, temporarily, by acting. Thought does not get expressed, thought does not control, but it does push and push. To get away from this pressure, a person acts, shouts, drives too fast, murders.

Suicides just want thought to stop. Drug users just want thought to stop. Terrorists, murderers, rapists, mountain climbers, death metal bands just want thought to stop.

From a zoomed-out perspective thought keeps dropping rocks into a pond, until the rippling waves wash onto the shore as actions. The actions are not chosen; they are pushed.

When we do something in irritation and instantly regret it, we ask, "Why did I do this?" Or, "What came over me?" Thought came over us. Thought can ride great waves of justification, righteousness, revenge. It can start wars.

If thought didn't exert pressure, we would not act. In that sense, the collection of all human acts, aka human history, is the result of thought.

The phrase, "Ignorance is bliss," in reality means: what we don't think about doesn't bother us. The only way, though, to not think about a piece of information is to not know it.

Counter to our Western culture, it is absolutely better to not know something than to know it and consequently be restricted by that knowledge.

In the country where I live it is in principle forbidden to let your dog off the leash, outside some few designated areas. For many years I didn't know this and let my dog roam free wherever I wanted. Then someone told me about this law. Now I have to don the mantle of defiance and wear a don't-fuck-with-me face when I go out and let my dog off the leash, which I continue to do. Knowledge did not improve my life or that of my dog.

[Core statement]:

We value knowledge that does not help us figure out life. We dismiss knowledge that prods us to do just that.

The requirements of logical consistency, repeatability, and a balanced, large statistical base, are an attempt to push knowledge into a level of objective truth. Something is true when it is concluded on the basis of 10,000 interviews, even if the conclusion is meaningless and incomprehensible.

In 80% of fatal traffic accidents the passengers wore seatbelts. The other 20% did not. Therefore, it is safer not to wear seatbelts. This conclusion is statistically sound. It is also wrong, of course.

Knowledge zooms in, increases thought, and makes us blind. When we zoom out, we know less but see more. To puncture the seatbelt story, we have to zoom out.

At this point it is useful to give an example of a piece of knowledge that has great prodding power, and yet is universally dismissed. The following example has been selected because of its extreme ability to irritate the hell out of us.

In 2011 a team from the Dakila Research and Zigurats Technology Center, Brazil, set up a laser on the shore of Lake Titicaca. They established two points, 33.78 km removed from each other across the surface of the water, and 1.5m above water level. The expected curvature of the earth across 33.78 km was calculated with the formula:

$$\text{height of the curvature} = r - \left(r \cdot \cos \left(\frac{d}{2 \cdot r} \right) \right)$$

It yields 22.4m as the height of the earth's curve between the two observation points. In other words, the laser beam was predicted to be invisible across the lake, blocked by a hill of water. But in the experiment it could easily be seen. It was filmed and recorded. During 2011 and 2012 the team performed numerous repeat experiments, using lasers, telescopes and radio transmitters. These have been documented and published. Similar experiments have been carried out by amateurs and scientists alike since Samuel Rowbotham in 1838.

This does not prove that the earth is flat. What it does seem to prove is that the surface of water has no curvature, regardless of distance. Ships don't drop below the horizon; they disappear from sight because the moisture in the air gets thicker the larger the distance becomes.

The findings cited above were achieved with scientific rigor and repeatability, yet they are dismissed and the people who publish them are labeled crackpots. Thoughts can get very totalitarian when many of them band together and insist their version of reality is correct. In a case like this we don't have any say in the matter. Thought will take over and speak its verdict with the same power as the old biblical phrase, "And thus spake the Lord."

[Core statement]:

We believe in thought more deeply, more irrevocably, more

passionately than any holy man or woman ever believed in God.

Note that this is an observation rather than an explanation. The believing is itself a thought action. We don't believe; thought does.

When asked why we hold strong beliefs, even when they are patently wrong, an answer is hard to come by if we ascribe the believing to ourselves. Why do we believe that money is the most important thing in life, when we know we are going die? It makes no sense. But if we locate the believing where it belongs, namely in thought, it suddenly makes a lot of sense. Of course thought believes in thought systems. It merely practices cronyism. Fellow thoughts, related by belief structure, will get support and attention. It's not hard to understand. Furthermore, we may die, but thought won't.

Believing that thought is a virtually independent actor, is itself a belief. Yes and no. We don't know what thought is, where it comes from, where it goes, or what its purpose is. When we zoom out in regard to ourselves and other people, thought acts as if it was in charge. This observation is our starting point.

The one element that seems to be left out of any knowledge system, is immediate, zoomed-out awareness. A thought slips by in the guise of information. *Water is H₂O*. Then other thoughts do the same. *Immersing nuclear waste into water, shields its radiation*. In the end we are under the impression that this information constitutes actual knowledge.

However, every single piece of information, no matter how basic, can be questioned as to veracity, meaning, implication, and source. We can ask every single time, How do you know? Often the answer is an uncomfortable, “I don’t know. Someone told me. I read it in a book.”

[Core statement]:

The strength of our belief in matters we don’t actually know, is an indicator of the independent power thought has over us.

[Core statement]:

We are not our thoughts, but we sure think so.

Every time we zoom out of a system, we see the holes, the shaky foundation, the locked doors that have never been opened. When we zoom out further, the system itself disappears.

Thought is sticky. It has momentum and weight. Zooming out of a questionable belief does not instantly disable the belief. This can be seen in ex-cult members who know they have been conned, yet need considerable time to work the cult ideas out of their system.

Every belief is questionable. Including the belief that water is H₂O.

To repeat, to make clear this is not a typo, even the belief that water is H₂O can be questioned.

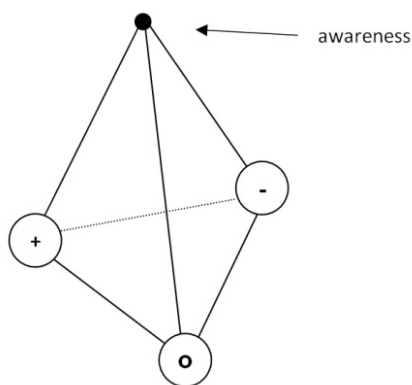
[Core statement]:

It is impossible to question a belief without stopping thought in its tracks. This is why so many beliefs go unquestioned.

We do not, and are not trained to, stop thought. The notion of not thinking is mostly unknown or dismissed. When it isn't dismissed, it is called meditation. But it's not meditation. To stop thought is a literal phrase, with a literal meaning, not another belief system to replace the current one.

In order to back up a car, we first need to bring it to a full stop.

The ability to see thought and to temporarily halt it, is an act of zooming out that equates with, or generates, awareness.



When we have the feeling of life pressing in on us, of problems clamoring to be dealt with, of having no choice and no good options, it is thought that is pressing in. Thoughts are not just intellectual, verbal statements that pop into our heads. Thoughts push, yank us around, and even cause panic.

[Core statement]:

Although friendly and useful thoughts have certainly been spotted in the wild, generally thoughts are not our friends.

Problems can't be solved by thinking. Odd, but observably true. Thoughts can suggest new avenues, ways out, unsuspected alternatives. But they can do nothing about an existing problem. In fact, thinking about it only makes it worse.

This insight is fundamental. It has, in another form, been attributed to Albert Einstein: "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." Therefore, one way to solve a problem is to not think about it. Not only is this easier said than done, it is often simply impossible.

A problem is located inside thought. If we didn't think, we wouldn't have the problem. For a practical problem the issue may get solved by taking action. But most problems are not practical. They depend on other people, or external factors, or money.

[Core statement]:

To try and not think about a problem is self-defeating. To try and not think at all, might work.

This sounds too simple to be true, is what thought would say to prevent the problem from evaporating.

It is a well-known fact that people have strong opinions about subjects they care about. A person might say that he doesn't believe in an afterlife. Or she might feel strongly about being vegetarian, because animals are living beings with a right to humane treatment. Or he is against abortion.

When we have strong opinions, we invariably base them upon external factors, sources, or experiences. Yet, it is key to

understand that the reason we think X (*fill in an opinion*) is that we think. We do not have the opinion because it is true or self-evident or confirmed by established science or shared by thousands of other people. We hold the opinion because we think. If we didn't think, there would be no opinion. If there were no runways, airplanes couldn't take off or land. Therefore, if there were no runways, there would be no airplanes.

Thinking is a runway.

Strong opinions are goons, sent out to break skulls in case of disagreement.

We think X, because we think. We think liberal, because we think. We think conservative, because we think. Thinking, therefore, is the cause of all problems, disagreements, wars. On the other hand, it is also the cause of all art, technology, and scientific achievement.

We come across people whose actions we severely disagree with, like serial killers, politicians, or the cranky neighbor next-door. We do not share their opinions and do not understand how they can act the way they do. But that is the only thing we don't have in common. We do have thinking in common, and thinking led to the actions we are abhorred by. We are, therefore not so different from the worst war criminal that ever lived. Because we think, and so did he.

The fact of thinking, as William James wrote at the dawn of psychology, is fundamental. It is more fundamental than we think.

[Core statement]:

That we think is far more essential, critical, and amazing than *what* we think.

What we think, is different; *that* we think, is the same.

That we think, is the Game of Thinking. *What* we think, is merely a storyline, one of many.

[Core statement]:

That we think, matters; *what* we think, matters not at all.

We believe, assume, have been told that thinking is a skill. It isn't. Thinking is what happens to us. Subsequently, we appropriate it as ours. Thought doesn't mind that we take credit for it. The more we do exactly that, the more we think. Somehow this benefits thought, even if it makes our lives an exhausting marathon of one thought after another in endless closed circles.

Thought wants to zoom in on things, ever more detailed, ever more distracting. Zooming out is an initial strategy toward acquainting ourselves with the prison of our mind.

A practical way of zooming out is to replace terms like explanation, knowledge, system, truth, with the term *legend*. The word signals we're dealing with a story, a narrative.

Matter consists of atoms and subatomic particles. Instead of taking this as scientific fact, take it as a legend. Democracy is necessary for a free world. This is a legend. The brain is the seat of thought. This is a legend. The planets revolve around the sun. This is a legend. We evolved from apes. This is a legend. Smoking causes cancer. This is a legend. The genders

are equal. This is a legend. Human life is sacred. This is a legend. And so on.

We tell ourselves legends. We teach them in schools. We fill books with them. We propagate them on Facebook and on CNN. We endorse them in accredited publications.

Looking at the above as legends, instead of as truths, frames content and creates distance. This makes it easier to take thinking less seriously. We acquire less thought. We begin to know we're bullshitting ourselves. Shocking world events, talk of war or poverty, the immigrant crisis, these are all legends, bad jokes, dungeons in the Game of Thinking.

Nothing is new and nothing is old.

The people who lived in the Middle Ages, or in ancient Egypt, or in the valley of the Tigris and the Euphrates, were just as modern, enlightened, aware, alive and human as we are today. They were not old-fashioned. Progress is a legend. Fixing the world's problems in the name of progress, is an old deception.

The reason we are exactly the same as a Celt from 2,000 years ago, is that we have the same mind. *What* they thought, was different. *That* they thought, makes us identical.

Incidentally, it is possible to confirm this insight with observation. Street cams made black-and-white recordings in the early days of moving pictures. These show a population of amused, over-confident people, dressed up in period costumes. However, the period was their own.

An example is footage from a 1913 Sunday afternoon in a Stockholm neighborhood.⁹ The people in films such as these clearly have no idea or awareness that they live in the past. Thought creates the legend of the past, as it creates the legend of the future. But we don't and can't live there. The 1913 street movie creates the strange impression that we are watching 2013 actors in a 1913 setting. It creates the impression we are watching ourselves.

We suffer from space-age assumptions of superiority. In the year 2113 we will be the ones dressed up in period clothing in archived YouTube clips.

This does not mean that we have finally managed, by watching the 1913 recording, to get a glimpse of the famed Hindu oneness of all human beings. "He who experiences the unity of life sees his own Self in all beings" (*Bhagavad Gita*).

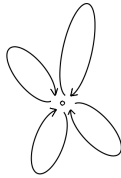
The distance-tinged view of 1913 people allows us to recognize that they have the exact same mind that we have. That is all. This is no indication of spiritual oneness. If it was, we might view such old films with gentle sympathy and a warm feeling of connection. Instead, the experience is disorientating, and even slightly horrific. The main question we are left with after absorbing the uncanny similarity between past and present, is: How can this be? Is this a trick movie?

It is disturbing to think that we have not progressed at all since 1913, or for that matter since 33 A.D., or 10,000 B.C. Our cultural mindset does not allow for such a possibility.

⁹ www.filmarkivet.se/movies/sondagsliv-i-vasastan

History is, literally, a legend.

At some point we may come to the conclusion that the world as we know it, though real enough, is also a legend.



CHAPTER IX: REALITY

We live in the middle of unexplained and unexplainable phenomena. Not ghosts, or UFOs, or the paranormal. The phenomena that are truly baffling are closer to home.

The fact of thinking. The passage of time at different speeds. The pull of gravity, an assumed force that displays none of the characteristics of energy, that has not yet been measured, and that is non-locatable on the electromagnetic spectrum. The fact of birth. The fact of death. The strange, non-personal images of certain dreams. The look in the eyes of a dog, who never asks any questions, maybe because he doesn't need to.

There is no need to understand black holes or string theory. Those things don't matter, and they may not even exist. There is, likewise, no need to understand ourselves. The benefits of understanding a fool are minimal, and we are all fools.

But there is a need to understand understanding itself.

[Core statement]:

While we may be convinced that the world of daily objects is

real, thought only recognizes thought as real. One of those thoughts is that the world is real.

There is no evidence this thought is more than just that, a thought.

Not even science can help out here, since the drilling down into reality has produced quantum physics, time reversals, particles that shouldn't exist, and missing particles that should. The larger the telescope, the larger the universe suddenly becomes, almost as if it was waiting for the development of better technology to increase its size.

If it is true that the world is not real, it follows that the effort to understand the world is futile.

We are back again to the one thing we know is real, namely our starting point. Without it, the concept of reality would not exist. This one thing is thought, and the fact of thinking.

We think. That is for sure. Everything else can be questioned. However, as we have seen many times already, we *don't* think. This does not change the fact of thinking; it's just that we are not responsible for it.

At this point the expression *we think* is a euphemism. According to the dictionary, a euphemism is an indirect expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh when referring to something unpleasant. We think. We give ourselves credit for something that in reality we are not in charge of or instigators of.

This point is consistently missed in both scientific explorations of mind and pseudo-spiritual teachings on self-improvement.

In *The Code of the Extraordinary Mind* (2016) Vishen Lakhiani makes a great pitch at being revolutionary and indeed tackles, seemingly, the issue of reality as created by our mind. He then advocates replacing dumbly adopted beliefs with self-chosen ones, without ever questioning where these so-called self-chosen ones come from. He assumes that we can escape the rules that govern our thinking by selecting new ones according to our goals, passions, and opinions.

Instead of adhering to strictly one religion, writes Lakhiani, we should pick the best bits from all religions. A rational and attractive idea, but it replaces oranges with oranges. Religion is religion, regardless of how it is concocted.

He does not go far enough.

It is difficult to do that.

Also, far enough may not be far enough.

[Core statement]:

Our opinions, passions, beliefs, behavioral codes are not the problem. Thought itself is.

The rungs of the ladder that we have climbed, are not the problem. The ladder itself is.

We think it is reality that dictates the need for the ladder. After all, we cannot kick away the ladder we are standing on.

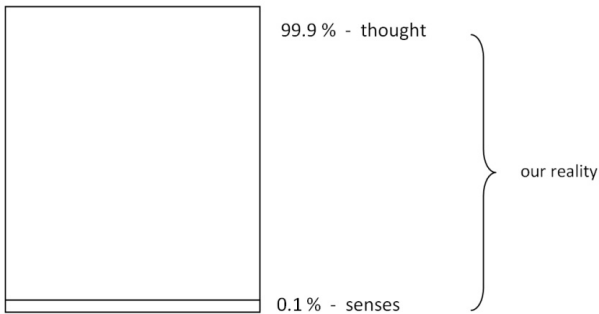
Or can we?

[Core statement]:

We are prisoners of thought. We call that situation reality.

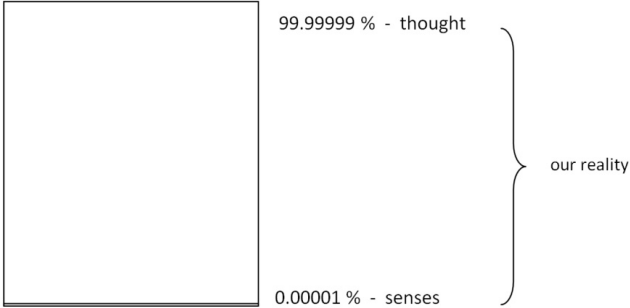
The term *reality* is tricky. Philosophers have forever tried to rephrase it with other terms, like essence, substance, substrate, being, existence, etc. More than other words, *reality* inducts us into complicity. We cannot say the word without it taking over our mind with silent acceptance. We think we know what we're talking about. But actually there is no word more undefined than *reality*.

When we are lost in thought, e.g. re-running the short conversation we had with the neighbor 5 minutes ago, we are in thought reality. When we breathe in the fresh moist air after a night's rainfall and walk through the forest with our senses open, we are not in thought reality. But only if we don't think. Even then the layer of "real" we experience through the body and the senses, is precariously fragile. Thought is waiting to come back with all the patience of a hungry dog.



We are not able to look at a tree, even without thinking, and not know it as a tree. The lifelong activity of thought has set patterns of perception in us, like grooves in an LP record.

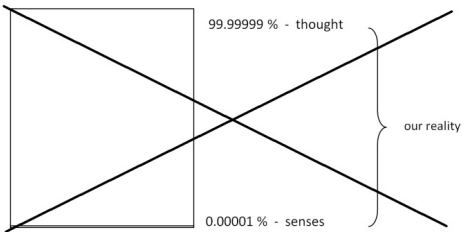
The diagram above is, therefore, generous in allowing 0.1% to external reality impressions. Most of the time the picture looks like this:



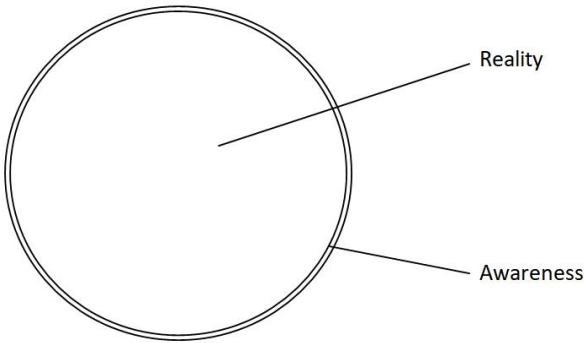
The curious fact about reality is that we're always in it. Even when unconscious, dreaming, or daydreaming, we are in some form of reality. It is, after all, not possible to be in unreality. Awareness is not a requirement for reality.

The consequence of this insight is that the diagram above is a false categorization. It doesn't matter whether we think or not, reality is still held in place by thought.

Reality is always present, whether we are aware of it or not. This means we scrap the diagram:

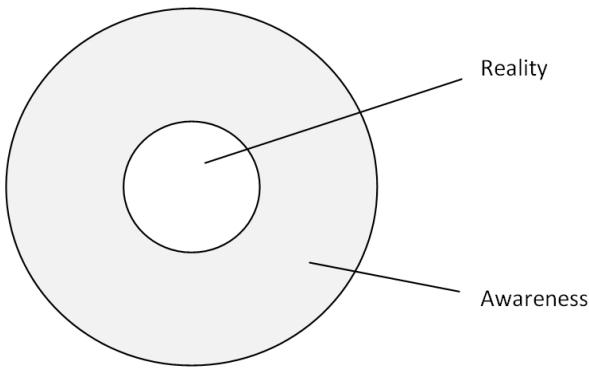


We replace it with:

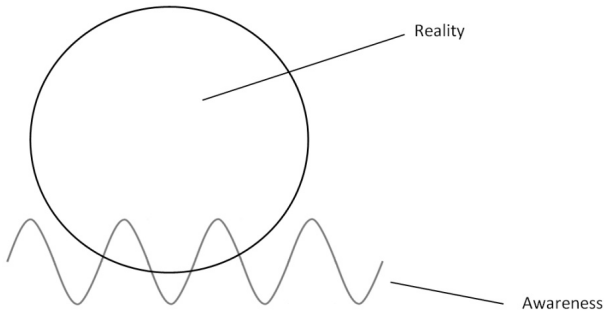


Awareness is a thin sheen around reality. Mostly we are immersed and submerged in life, without self-awareness. Sometimes we zoom out enough to become conscious of being alive.

Diagrams, though dispensable, as we have seen, encourage new questions. The rectangle of 99.9 – 0.1% prompts the obvious thought: could it be closer to 50 – 50%? Should it be? Is it? Can we even imagine what life would be like if, in the circular diagram, the thin layer of awareness was a thick band?



We have awareness. But, unlike thinking, this is not a fact, not an unceasing truth. Awareness comes and goes. Reality, which is really thought, is permanent. Thus an even better diagram would be:



The circle indicates that reality extends in all directions. There is nowhere that it isn't. The sine wave indicates that awareness is a generated and, in our case, diminished presence. It is not guaranteed, though its complete absence in an organism would likely entail death.

Death does not mean the end of reality; it does mean the end of awareness.

On a planet devoid of any form of life, even at the microbiological level, reality still exists. Awareness does not.

[Core statement]:

The thing about reality is that we can't get rid of it. The more we think about it, the more of it comes into being.

Reality is tied to thinking. This tie is utterly mysterious. We do not think up reality. We don't create it. It is more a matter of holding it in place.

From this we can derive the following:

[Core statement]:

Thought holds reality in place.

Thought does; we do not. Reality exists, with or without thought. But, in our case, thought focuses it in an astoundingly all-pervasive way. Thought acts like a lens; but it isn't *our* lens.

[Core statement]:

The "I" in "I think" is completely accidental.

We have so far, in this and previous books, hinted at practices to game thinking:

- Not thinking
- Being aware of being aware
- Acquiring less thought
- Zooming out
- Energy clearing
- HRV breathing

None of these practices are guaranteed to work; that would be too easy. Nor do they offer a step-by-step approach. Life is not a 7-step process, regardless of how many gurus claim it is. There is no guidance here, because guidance is thought.

[Core statement]:

Thought does not guide us, especially not when it pretends to.

[Core statement]:

Guidance is one of the ways thought gets us to think more.

Non-thinking is a better guide than thinking.

Awareness is not a guide at all, but may be the only thing we have when the curtain comes down.

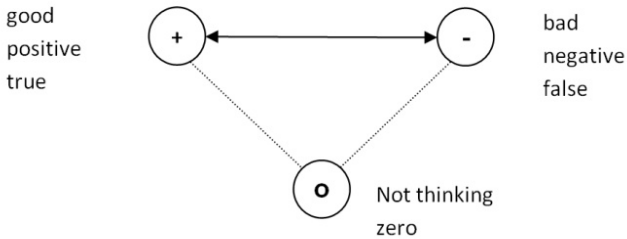
The Game of Thinking is about life and death.

The phrase “life and death” is a power phrase, meant to make old ladies shiver. But when we zoom out, it appears to be mere rhetoric based on well-rehearsed duality. Whenever we see two options, the response should be, where or what is the third one? Life and death and X (*currently unknown*).

Similarly, when accepting that freedom cannot be made dependent on external reality, we automatically try to locate it inside. Freedom can be found inside ourselves, is such an enticing line. But probably not true. We believe it, until we zoom out and search for the third option. There has to be one, for the simple reason that freedom is neither inside nor outside.

After all, our internal reality is full of thought and thus anything but free.

We have already constructed a diagram with duality and non-thinking in chapter VII:



This configuration is a logical consequence of duality being the playing field of thought. Not thinking is, therefore, the third leg.

Reality is threefold. One aspect out of three tends to remain invisible, which means inaccessible to thought.

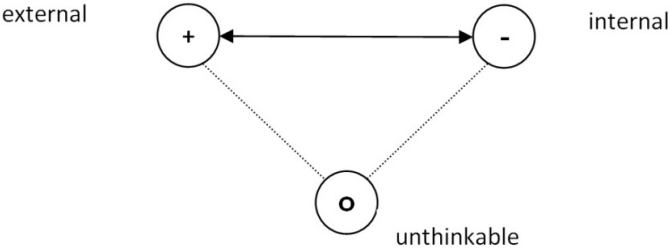
That which we can't see, we can't think about. When we create projections, fantasies, extrapolating assumptions, they become visible, even if only to our own mind.

Following this line of reasoning, we can conclude that a dimension of reality exists which we are unable to grasp with thought. Not because we don't try hard enough, or because we lack training or knowledge, but because it is not possible *in principle*.

This principle peeks out through Aldous Huxley's perception theories: that we perceive reality at all, is due to filtering out of the immensity of the cosmos. It shows itself in the

quantum physical uncertainty principle: wave vs. particle, position vs. speed. Of course, it is present in the card game that we started this book with: poker, with its three modes of action. It can be spotted in our inability to see into the future or beyond the curtain of death.

We must adjust the diagram like this:



Since our mind only perceives dual reality, it is flawed, incomplete, handicapped. No amount of thinking can overcome this flaw.

Unthinkable does not mean mystical, but rather indigestible by thought, encrypted to prevent thought processing, or way too heavy to lift.

Because our reality is defined by thought, an unknown segment of reality, unknown in size and depth and quality, is cut off from us.

The core statement from a few pages ago did not, however, say *defined* by thought, but *held in place* by thought. This means that the unthinkable segment of reality is not held in

place by thought. Thought has no grip on it. Since that is the case, it is unthinkable.

This is more than wordplay. When something is not held in place, it drifts away, like a balloon. Our mind, and thus our reality, behaves exactly like this. When unmoored due to alcohol or drugs or extreme fatigue, our mind drifts away. Time, space, logic, morals, all become elastic.

It is tempting to try to make the unthinkable thinkable, to anchor it in knowable reality. But that is not the goal. Dragging the unknown into the thinking realm, solidifies the grip that thinking has on us. This is the opposite of what we want.

On the other hand, it is hard to desire the unthinkable. It is easier to aim at something vague like “emptiness,” since it has attributes like silent, dark, spacious. The unthinkable has no such attributes.

The triangle above shows how choices land up in duality, i.e. we choose between two things, never three. If we can find words to discuss a choice, it is not unthinkable. The following quote shows, again, that people of long ago were just as advanced as we are today: “The Tao that can be talked about, is not the real Tao” (Lao Tzu, 533 B.C.). This opening line of the *Tao Te Ching* is followed by some 26,000 words of further exploration. Scoffing commentators have time and again mocked the verbose efforts of those who place the deepest wisdom in silence. This is misplaced mockery. The ancient philosophers were not talking about silence or emptiness or stillness. Those terms belong within duality. The Tao, or the unthinkable, is not a dual term, and is meant as no more than

a placeholder. As a third vector to reality, it is neither active nor passive, empty nor full, noisy nor silent.

Our thinking is not equipped to comprehend it.

There may be a reason why this is so. But first we need to give up the pretense that thought, which we identify with, can handle anything, and that it is some kind of super power. It isn't.

The formal answer to the question, *What is reality*, is that reality consists of two sections knowable duality and one section unknowable third vector. This is an unsatisfactory answer, but a useful one.

Any answer that satisfies our thinking, is fully embedded in thinking. A person who desires such an answer, can easily find it in the millions of books of science, history and philosophy in the national library. Those volumes contain well-thought-through, well-researched explanatory models that all but eradicate the notion of anything mysterious remaining in the world.

The formal answer, by insisting on an unknowable vector, provides existential relief to the person for whom the library is a maze inside a prison, instead of an open door to freedom and understanding.

[Core statement]:

The moment we think we know, we don't.

The moment we ask a question that cannot be answered, our irritation brings us to the edge of thought, the edge of duality.

It is an understatement that most people don't want to venture out to this edge. What is more, they are held in the conviction that no such edge exists, or if it does, that it is irrelevant, crazy, untrustworthy and somehow against the rules. This conviction is a thought presence that pushes the edge away until the very thought of an edge becomes ludicrous.

The edge of thought, which is also the edge of reality, does exist. We see it when monitoring our thoughts and realizing with dismay, desperation even, that there are thoughts we cannot think, no matter how hard we try. There are levels of insight not available to us, no matter how loudly we protest.

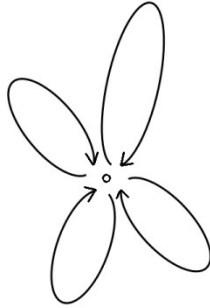
Thought, the ladder we stand on, is itself incapable of going there.

[Core statement]:

The reason the edge of thought is called an edge, is that thought ceases when we get there.



The purpose of the current book is to bring thought to the edge, again and again, with the petal leaf diagram as a road map:



The edge of thought is not out there, nor in here. It exists where thought stops.

[Core statement]:

Thought stops at the same place it starts.

At the edge of thought we find no answers. We find, instead, possibilities that were not possible. Since reality is bigger than we know, than we *can* know, this is no surprise.

When thinking occupies all the space in the mind, the edge is blocked out. (The terms thinking and mind are of course synonymous, but language has old habits.) Space in the mind is provided by not thinking. Without non-thinking it is hard to conceive of a third aspect to reality. It is simply not there.

Our standard response to a problem or a question is to think about it. Or worse, to have an emotion about it.

Our standard response needs to be dropped.

[Core statement]:

Not thinking is not a concept. It simply means to not think.

Absorption of mental activity by a movie, a book, physical exercise, or a video game, is addictive. The standard explanation is that intense stimulation becomes a craving, a neurological expectation. Another explanation, quite opposite in implication, is that the stimulating activities provide moments, even hours, of non-thinking time. We are drawn to the one-person shooter or the John Sandford novel, because we can stop thinking for a little while.

When our thoughts assail us unabatedly and we lack any activity to get involved in, we call it boredom. The experience is awful, not because we have nothing to do, but because we cannot stop thinking.

[Core statement]:

We think we are blessed by thought, when it is the fact of thinking that accounts for all strife and suffering.

The inability to contemplate mystery indicates the absence of not thinking in a person. In their reality the answers have already been found, and all that is needed, in their opinion, is understanding these answers better. This goal is never reached.

Occasionally a person manages to turn mystery-tinged topics into answers. David Icke, author of *The Biggest Secret* (1999), is an example of someone who uses the technique of asking questions, which then turn out to be answers in disguise, to get away with thin evidence for his claims.

No matter how idealistically we profess to have a questioning nature, in the end it is answers we want.

[Core statement]:

Answers sell; questions don't.

[Core statement]:

The search for answers is thought searching for loot, food, and growth opportunities. Thought's growth, not ours.

When reality perplexes us, our response is fear, uncertainty, confusion. Yet, it's not our response, it is thinking that gets fearful and confused. Reality is always perplexing, every second of every day. We can't see that and can't live in such a reality. Thought, and its love for answers, shields us from too much reality.

The scientific world reference will theoretically admit that we are bombarded by millions of signals, particles and rays. But that is not reality; that is duality. Rays that we don't feel, don't matter.

The third vector of reality is not found in too much input. It is found where input and output cease, where thinking no longer manages to hold reality in a place of duality.

Our reality is malleable. We can literally shape it. A useful example is the human energy centers that are called chakras. We supposedly have seven of these, vertically distributed in the body.



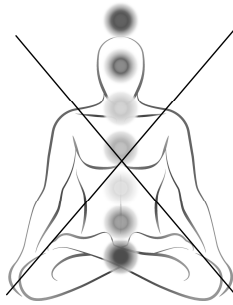
A student will follow these steps:

1. Temporarily accept the belief that chakras exist, despite never having seen or felt them
2. Focus feeling and sensation on the area of the body where one of these chakras is said to be located, e.g. the throat or the solar plexus
3. Repeat step 1 and 2, until:
4. You “feel” the chakra, can easily locate it, and even more easily talk about it

Let us zoom out and think statistically. Out of 7 billion people, not more than a generously estimated few thousand claim to have direct experiential knowledge of chakras. This amounts to less than 0.0001% of the human race. Furthermore, the probability that the human body has seven chakras that have escaped medical and technological detection for centuries, is less than 1%.

We may have missed them, but it’s bloody unlikely.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that chakras don’t exist.



Yet, the student of spiritual development now feels them, because he has molded a sensitivity of certain hotspots in the physical body reality, informed by traditional teachings. Chakras have been pulled into duality existence by thought. Their reality is just as definite, proven, absolute, as neutrinos, leptons, gravitons, tetraquarks, and black holes, all of which are seen as established facts.

Reality is malleable by thought. This is the reason we think we know so much, are so advanced, and are, as a human race, on an evolutionary ascending spiral.

This is pure bullshit.

[Core statement]:

Thought loves bullshit. It loves bullshit for the same reason that plants do: it makes them grow.

We think we grow, but it's thought that does.

In a perplexing reality, questions are the closest that thought can bring us to the unthinkable. Even a child knows this.

Yet, in almost any knowledge discipline questions are considered a privilege reserved for more experienced professionals, the professors, the senior advisors, the

authorities. Interestingly, though these people have earned the privilege, they never use it.

Asking questions is often taken as an insult to the established order. The rationale is that we must learn the basics first. Before we can ask questions, we must learn what has gone before, what the tradition is, what answers have already been found.

This is false reasoning. After we have learned the basics, we no longer feel the urgency. The questions may even have gone away. We have become brainwashed, indoctrinated, educated. Answers, i.e. thoughts, have filled the empty spaces of our mind. We now carry thought like a full water jar, balanced on top of our head. We can no longer bend down and see what's hidden beneath a stone in the road.



Therefore, when it comes to knowledge that kills the urge to question, it is better to have no knowledge.

Sometimes questions are welcome, but questioning isn't. Our mind, emotion, personality, is touchy and on permanent defensive alert when it comes to someone questioning our assumptions.

[Core statement]:

You can ask what time it is, but you cannot ask whether the watch is on time.

Anything we believe to be true, is open to questioning. The more we believe it to be true, the more it should be questioned. Reality consists of three vectors, not two. Questioning the truth of something, does not make it false.

We are breaking apart the hold that limited duality thinking has on reality.

The biggest drawback to questioning is that it leaves us nowhere. Being left nowhere is, at the same time, the greatest benefit. Undermining a belief or highlighting the shakiness of an assumption, does not yield any reward other than disempowering thought's hold over us.

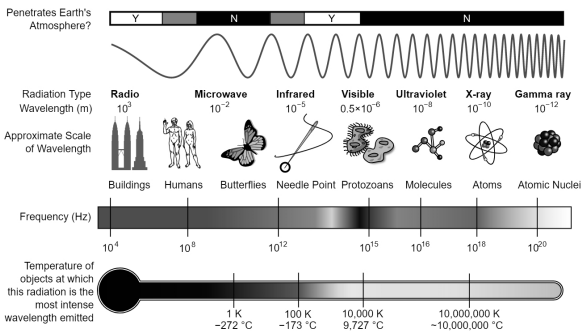
Reality is what we have to put up with day after day. It makes life hard. We can't control it and we can't escape it. Innocent people get blown up or die in hospital beds. But innocent people also get lucky, their cancer goes into remission, they miraculously survive a plane crash.

And no one knows why. We do not understand reality. The unthinkable vector makes it so.

[Core statement]:

Reality isn't so much a philosophical concept as it is a pain in the ass.

A classical conception, or misconception, of reality is the electromagnetic spectrum. It is defined as the range of all possible frequencies of electromagnetic radiation. The limit for long wavelengths is the size of the universe itself, while the short wavelength limit is in the vicinity of the Planck length (1.616×10^{-35} m). The picture below demonstrates how this explanatory model blocks out all of known reality:



Since the scale is numerical, it is not possible to miss out on part of reality. It covers, after all, all frequencies. Neither is it possible for reality to stretch outside of the range, for the reason that the range in question is the theoretical and practical totality. Furthermore, there cannot be realities within the mapped wavelengths that are unmeasured or immeasurable. If telepathy is real, it must involve an energy transmission within the electromagnetic spectrum. Since no such energy has been detected, and not for lack of trying, it can't be real.

The scale accounts numerically for all possible frequencies. Therefore, undetectable phenomena cannot exist. This includes: ghosts, spirits, out of body experiences, angels, deities, gods, God, fairies, aliens, miracles, healing power, communication with the dead, the dead themselves, ley lines, the human aura, chakras. None of these can be found in the electromagnetic spectrum. There's no space for them.

This argument is convincing and has all the power and authority of modern science behind it.

But it is a reality construct, held in place by thought. The construct breaks down when we include items in the list that

are equally immeasurable and thus evidently not part of reality: thought itself, consciousness itself, life itself. The logical conclusion of the argument is that life itself does not exist.

Reality cannot be defined using wavelengths. The framework, though solidly scientific, is wrong.

At this point it should be obvious that our idea of reality is missing an essential dimension.

[Core statement]:

Our concept of reality is like a two-legged chair. You can sit on it, but don't lean back.



Thought is very much part of our daily experienced reality. The fact that thoughts cannot be measured, located, packaged, transmitted electronically, copied, stored, or chemically analyzed, either means that thoughts are not real or that reality is not real. In the latter case, saying that red light has a frequency of 4×10^{14} Hz is merely a descriptive fluke of thought-reality observation. It doesn't matter. It doesn't mean anything. The number does not explain red. We cannot say $\text{red} = 4 \times 10^{14}$ Hz, any more than we can say

Winston Churchill = 7×10^{27} atoms. The number of atoms does not explain or give any clue about Winston Churchill.

[Core statement]:

Thought is real; reality isn't.

[Core statement]:

We exist inside a Game of Thinking. We call it the universe, life, reality. But it is the Game of Thinking, a game not played by us, but by thought.

Our inexorable starting point is the fact of thinking. Not *what* we think, but *that* we think. This fact is super obvious; it hides in plain sight, as the saying goes. Even in broad daylight it is virtually impossible to recognize. But we must recognize it.

It doesn't matter that we need to earn a living to survive in this world. What does matter is that we think we do.

It doesn't matter that someone dies in a stupid car accident at a young age. What matters is that we think so.

It doesn't matter that immigrants flee their home countries in search of a better life. What does matter is that we think about it.

It doesn't matter who runs the government. What does matter is that we think it matters.

[Core statement]:

The Game of Thinking is real; reality isn't.

That doesn't make sense, the mind says... But, detecting a logical inconsistency in a philosophical discourse about reality

is only reasonable. What else can we expect when reality is full of contradictions and logical inconsistencies?

[Core statement]:

Thinking is a game and reality is the landscape in which it is played.

Calling thinking a game is a necessary step in disrobing thought of its mantle of seriousness, authority and inevitability. We cannot imagine human life without thought. But we don't have to. An argument that falls back on "all people," or "the whole of civilization," is a cop-out. It is similar to saying, What if everyone threw candy wrappers on the street, let their dog off the leash, drove too fast? Everyone isn't. The argument is a thought deception.

We may not be able to imagine all human life without thought, but we only need to imagine our own life without thought.

One immediate way of doing that is to practice periods with no thinking.

Another immediate way of doing that is to think in slow motion. Instead of, "I need to have breakfast," think, "I... (3 seconds) ...need... (3 seconds) ...to... (3 seconds) ...have... (3 seconds) ...breakfast..."

[Core statement]:

Thought, contrary to popular opinion, is not a necessity.

[Core statement]:

It is necessary to live to think, but it is not necessary to think to live.

[Core statement]:

Reality expands when thought shrinks.

[Core statement]:

The more we think, the less what we think matters.

We think problems are solved with thinking. But actually thinking creates the problems, and not thinking solves them.

When something doesn't make sense, we dismiss it. Our thinking demands that it makes sense. Thought will use the specters of reasonability, common sense, logic and fairness, to convince us it is reasonable, sensible, logical and fair.

[Core statement]:

We have no defense against thinking.

Thought does not have us by the throat, nor does it have us by the balls. It has us by the mind, which is worse.

The view that reality exists out there in objective form, waiting to be taken in by the senses or measured by instruments, is a thought configuration that was already evidenced by Aristotle. His voice was lucid enough to record a view that may well go back to the dawn of civilization, which is the dawn of thought.

The view that we exist in an external world is so deeply anchored in our minds, it cannot realistically be challenged. Take away the external world and nothing is left, no culture, no history, no being. This does not mean that the world we think we live in, looks the way we think it does. It only means that the bottom line truth of our reality is:

[Core statement]:

We exist in a world.

This is hardly a shattering realization. But note the formulation “a world,” not “the world.” By saying, We exist in *the* world, we plunge into assumptions and collective theories about what that world is like. By saying, We exist in *a* world, we merely recognize a fact about existence, similar to the fact of thinking.

The world we live in may be more complex, multi-leveled and mysterious than the most adventurous philosophers of science can describe.

With thought being the dominant fact of our lives, the reality we live in is determined in shape, form, content, pressure, qualities and limits, by thought. In other words, external reality does not itself determine our experience of it. It does not impress itself upon us with scientific neutrality.

[Core statement]:

Thought creates a focal point through which the rays of reality get combined into the world as we know it.

If we didn't think, or if we could abruptly stop thinking, the world as we know it would cease to exist. We would still exist in a world, it just would not necessarily be this one.

The statement, We live in a world, is not as banal and meaningless as it seems at first. Thought wrestles with the statement's simplicity, its stubbornness. Thought wants to race ahead. But in this study we don't race ahead; our method is to return to the starting point again and again.

Until it yields.

So we live in a world. But when we sleep, and dream, we live in a different world. The argument that our body lies in bed in the ordinary world, is intellectual and, from the standpoint of the dreamer, simply not a fact. We think a dream is fleeting, but we experience it as real. It is only fleeting when we wake up, when we shift realities.

No matter what death is, it is a safe assumption that a similar shift occurs when we die.

In our dream we walk in a foreign city and meet people we are certain we know but have never met. Then we wake up and the memory of the dreamscape slips away. We shift reality. Reality doesn't shift; we do. The reality of lying at home in bed was not interrupted as we walked in the foreign city.



Waking up entails a change of focus. We shift into a different reality. Drugs can entail the same. Extreme exhaustion can. Fasting can. Meditation can. In each case, the way thought configures reality, changes.

It may be useful here to recall that the totality of human knowledge, science, technology, psychology, neurology, cannot explain how this happens. We don't know. It is a mystery. Chemical changes in the brain or in the body do not even come close to solving it.

The brain is itself part of the world we live in. Brain chemistry can, therefore, by definition not explain how our experiential focus shifts from one reality to another. Because, when we dream and live in a world different from the consensus ordinary one, we do not necessarily have a brain.

People who have made out of body journeys, like Monroe, Castaneda, Atwater, Brinkley, Eadie, and hundreds more, report being able to move through walls. Clearly, if they had a brain, in a skull connected to a body, they would not be able to do so.

The argument that such experiences are illusory fabrications within the physical brain, is disproven by even one single instance of accurate information retrieval through out of body means. Such instances abound in the literature. Remote Viewing is a documented discipline that does exactly that.

[Core statement]:

If it can be done once, it can be done.

That doesn't mean it happens every time or that everyone can do it or that it is repeatable. It only means that if it can be done once, it can be done.

Let us revisit this astounding insight in the following steps:

- We live in a world

- We shift worlds on a daily basis, e.g. in dreaming
- During the experience of a world different from our cultural consensus one, we do not necessarily have a brain as the physical apparatus for perception and thinking

Reality is far from a well-known, well-defined entity.

Thought does not need a brain. The brain is not the cause of thought. Thought may, however, need a brain for us to be able to think in this world.

But even that last, seemingly rational, statement can be questioned. Animals have brains, yet they don't think. Therefore, brains \neq thinking.

In the film *Rampage* (2018) Dwayne the Rock Johnson communicates with an oversized gorilla through sign language. These conversations certainly make clear that the gorilla has some thinking capacity. This does not contradict the brains \neq thinking inequality: one animal with brains and no thinking ability, establishes the base line. Besides, the gorilla is CGI. The bigger and, so far, unanswered question raised by the *Rampage* movie is how the producers were able to teach sign language to Dwayne Johnson.¹⁰

Our conception of reality is that we live in a world of people, cars, buildings, roads, machines, forests, mountains, etc. But when we walk down the street our actual reality is: a flash of envy at that shiny new Audi, a quick judgment toward the noisy truck passing by, then extending that judgment to the

¹⁰ This is a joke.

driver of the truck, whom we didn't even see, a pain in the lower back from walking, a peak of interest in a woman far down the street, too far to see clearly, but all blond women look attractive at long distance, the relief of a tree's shade in the hot sun, irritation at a sudden gust of wind that blows into our eyes, as if the wind did it on purpose, a worry about looking ridiculous in the eyes of passersby, though there is no discernible reason for that feeling.

[Core statement]:

Our reality isn't things. It is thoughts and feelings.

Therefore, a philosophical or scientific system that presumes our reality to be things, is automatically out of touch and wrong.

Reality is all those things that we do and don't like, with emphasis on "like" and no emphasis on "things."

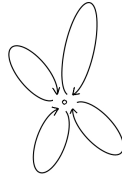
[Core statement]:

We don't see things; we only see their likable or unlikable aspects.

Of course, most of the time we're not focused on the semi-external aspects of the world around us. We are, instead, focused in thought, or rather, lost in thought.

Our reality is what we think. This is why life sometimes feels like it's getting away from us, like we're not in charge, have no control, are subject to whatever happens next even if nothing happens next. That is exactly our relationship to our own thoughts.

Our thoughts run our lives, but we are not our thoughts. They are not ours. The problem highlighted in this book is far greater than we can imagine.



CHAPTER X: THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

We experience, on an hourly basis, a veritable flood of thoughts. Reality is what we think, and we are flooded by what we think.

When too many people try to get through a door, they block the door. The event may be accompanied by screaming and shouting.

When too many thoughts try to get our attention or processing time, our attention gets blocked. The event may be accompanied by stress, irritation, tiredness, listlessness, depression, a lack of meaning, a desperate need for excitement and entertainment to get back into the flow.

[Core statement]:

There are more thoughts than there are people. As a result we all feel a little overstuffed.

In most cases our reaction to a problem is to look for new input, new stimuli, new opportunities, new funding, new medicine. We use the word *solution*, which means: making something thinner. We dilute paint with turpentine, whiskey with ice cubes. Solving a problem is the opposite of concentrating (on) it.

In simple terms this is the crux of the matter.

We cannot beat thinking at its own game. Thought wants to enter us and thrive, much like we want to enter a school and learn, a career and earn money, a house and live, a restaurant and eat. Thought wants it. Thought wants more. Thought wants new.

Therefore, the first step of a solution is to do the opposite. Don't let thought in, aka not thinking. Think less, aka acquire less thought. Think about the old, aka expose underlying assumptions.

The Game of Thinking is rigged in favor of thought. We are literally programmed to look for new things, to want more of what we already have, to be better and cleverer than the next person, to take care of number one. This programming constitutes the rules of the game. Without rules there is no game.

We cannot fight thought, we cannot destroy it, we cannot stop it. Thought exists. This is our reality.

Yet, we wonder if we can live without thought. That is thought talking. The all-or-nothing pattern of our thinking

tricks us up in this respect. Because actually we absolutely can't live without thought. Holding our breath and diving to the bottom of the swimming pool, does not prove we can live without air. It only means we can live without air for a short while. It is the same with thought.

[Core statement]:

The solution to thinking is to empty ourselves of it.

Because we think that we think, every thought is seen as produced by us, as coming out of our mind. The opposite is true. Every thought we think comes into our mind, a phenomenon we cannot effectively stop from occurring.

[Core statement]:

The fact of breathing means air is already inside us. The fact of thinking means thought is already inside us.

When we play a game, whether it is soccer or chess or Fallout 4, we play because there is an instant and more or less continual reward. We do not play for the end result only. We enjoy 99% of the game as it is played. If we lose, no big deal, that is only 1%.

The Game of Thinking is the same, with one difference: we are not the players; thought is. Thought doesn't care much about the outcome, about being right or wrong, good or evil, being a winner or a loser. Thought cares, but only 1%. Thought plays the game because of instant and continual reward.

As humans we cannot fully understand this reward. We have a partial understanding through human level analogies with

our own feeding experiences. We enjoy food, we enjoy a game, we enjoy sex, we enjoy a walk in nature.

[Core statement]:

Thought is not human.

For most of us such an idea is classified as crazy. That does not invalidate the idea. Slapping the crazy label on something is an automatic act of thought. It is the result of thought's immunity system that protects it from attack.

So to repeat:

[Core statement]:

Thought gets instant and continual reward out of thinking.

This reward is so powerful and necessary, like air is for a diver, that thought will think with near absolute urgency.

We ourselves do not get this reward. In fact, we can hardly conceive of it. We are in the grip of thought, and thought is not human.

Why does a massage feel good? It does not feel good because it gives us stimulation, impressions, sensations, input. Also consider that it is when the massage pressure gets close to being painful that it feels most satisfying. A massage feels good because it squeezes something out of our muscles. It does not matter whether this refers to chemicals, toxins, trigger points, or stress, tensions, and emotions.



'Now Mr. Henshaw, let's see if we can't work some of that tension out of your neck.'

This is the crux of the matter. It has nothing to do with putting in, but everything with squeezing out. Thinking feels good to thought, because it squeezes something out of the thinking muscles. What thinking muscles are those? They are called human beings. *We* are the thinking muscles for thought.

If thinking only felt good to thought and not at all to us, the system wouldn't work. Thought gives us benefits, no doubt about it. We can write books, invent motorcycles, program computers. We can dream up grand schemes of evolution and the growth of civilization, to justify and feel pleased with our place in the universe. We can argue and prove that human beings are the best thing ever.


All this is a minor benefit granted to us by thought in order to keep us thinking. The Biblical term is *tithing*, except they deliberately got the percentage wrong. Tithing traditionally means giving 10% of our income to God (or church or state) and keeping the remaining 90%. Thought has arranged it the

other way around. We give up 90% and get to keep the rest. We don't have any choice in the matter. 90% is squeezed out, 10% is what's left. That percentage is sufficient for us to believe we are the pinnacle of civilization, culture and intellectual achievement.

[Core statement]:

It stands to reason that if thought cannot get its instant and continual reward, if it cannot squeeze it out of us, then it will leave us alone.

The crux of the matter is to make ourselves uninteresting to thought. In order to reduce the 90% that goes to thought, we start by decreasing the 10% that goes to us. For example by not thinking. This works because the tithing ratio is fixed.



Ours	10	9	8	7	6	5
Thought's	90	81	72	63	54	45

According to this descending sequence we only have to halve our thinking in order for thought to drop below 50%.

[Core statement]:

It is necessary to think. What is not necessary is to think all the time.

What is absolutely not necessary is to think more than we already do. This false necessity is presented to us in the form of education, innovation, new theories, debate, research, learning. We are encouraged, even forced, to think more on a daily basis.

Thought is incredibly powerful. Instead of concluding that we, therefore, need to think more and better all the time, we have to conclude that the wiser approach is to tap the power of thought only at selected times. This is similar to switching off the light when we don't need it.

Our culture does not believe in switching off the light. Street lights, as well as traffic signals, in all major cities stay on all night long, even when there is no traffic. Computers and smart phones are on permanent standby. Shops need to be open 24/7 in order to compete. The Internet never shuts down.

Please note that energy saving devices do not switch off the light when we don't need it. They switch off the light in order to save money, regardless of whether we need the light or not. Motion sensors or timers to re-activate the light use electricity themselves. Therefore, in truth the energy consumption is never off.

The power of thought does not go away when we don't use it. Just like electricity does not disappear when the lights are off.

Thought is intent on feeding off our thoughts and emotions. This creates a vulnerability. While we certainly are dependent on thought, the tithing ratio says that thought is 10 times more dependent on us. Since one person is negligible in the larger picture, if that person no longer provides reliable income, he or she is ignored.

[Core statement]:

Thought needs human thinking, but it does not need yours or mine specifically.

This is exactly the reason human history seems to have been shaped by isolated great figures, leaders and thinkers. History has not been a collective effort. Individuals here and there tapped the power of thought by reducing the overall, non-selective influence of thought on them. The biography of every explorer, military or religious leader, artist, or inventor, reports something weird in their behavior. This something stands out as unconnected and even contradictory to their genius. Churchill took naps, Jesus went into the desert, Sibelius got drunk, and so on.

The argument is not reversible, since plenty of people visit the desert, get drunk or take naps. But the ability to opt out of thinking at selected times gives us the ability to opt back in to thinking at selected times. To simply think as part of the massive flood of human thought, does not give us anything. To identify with thought, and to allow it to keep its lights on at all times, is to be a leaf floating on the surface of an enormous raging river of thought.

We have to acknowledge, though, that no method exists that is guaranteed to work in reducing thought's hold on us. Any teacher or book that claims they have such a method, is lying.

Some methods work some of the time for some people. That is the best that can be said about them. No methods work all of the time or for all people.

Note that the list of methods includes: meditation, joining a monastery, praying, vision questing, energy work, sensory deprivation, connecting to the Pleiadian Emissaries of Light,

becoming a vegetarian, journeying in shamanic rituals, studying ancient writings, practicing yoga, talking to Jesus.

“Traveler, there is no path. The path is made by walking.”
(Antonio Machado)

“All paths are the same: they lead nowhere.” (Castaneda, 1968)

Castaneda’s books have the delightful property of telling up front they’re full of crock, and then giving us the crock anyway. This has been used a criticism against them, to the point that some people push them to be classified as fiction. To criticize someone who tells you repeatedly that nothing he tells you is true, is hilariously stupid.

The secrets of life have been given away multiple times in the history of philosophy and mysticism. Thought doesn’t mind that. Thought doesn’t mind if we see its true nature. As long as we keep thinking. As long as the Game of Thinking continues.

In the game of poker the action that statistically contributes most to winning, is folding, or the decision to refrain from playing the current hand. Thought needs human thinking, but we can individually refrain from thinking the current batch of thoughts.

People cannot stop thinking, but you and I can. Since most people will dismiss this advice as bullshit, thought is safe. There is no danger that thinking will run out of hosts.

Prison breaks are rarely democratic events. When we think, “I am a human being, part of a greater whole,” we shackle

ourselves to every other person alive. When we “stand on the shoulders of giants,” as the popular phrase goes, we define ourselves as midgets. Giants don’t stand on other giants’ shoulders: they are much too heavy.



Democracy, collective efforts, the union movement, shared goals, peace and love, don’t work in beating the Game of Thinking.

The opposite, in the form of extreme selfishness and disregard for others, works short term but never long term. The short term struggle to become free is the equivalent of

researching escape routes out of the prison, gathering tools, finding one or two helpers to distract the guards.

We are stuck in the Game of Thinking. No one will come to free us, which is the classic savior syndrome that ensures a passive attitude. There is no heaven waiting to receive us after death, which is the classic deferred salvation syndrome that ensures more passivity. Living to a ripe old age, in good health and in good wealth, is an achievable but ultimately deceptive dream. Even if we achieve it, we will still realize at the point of death that it was all for nothing.

[Core statement]:

A prisoner who doesn't feel motivated to escape, won't.

Therefore, short term selfishness is a necessity.

In the long term, drawing attention to oneself is a recipe for failure, and is the last thing an escapee wants to do.

A religion dies the moment it becomes institutionalized. Its death is sealed when it establishes a church board that would persecute and crucify their own founding fathers should they be so unlucky as to walk into the board meeting. Famous and idolized artists always lose their edge. Great unfortunate examples are Jean Sibelius, who spent 35 years not finishing his 8th symphony, and J.K. Rowling, whose post-Harry Potter books are shallow beyond belief.

[Core statement]:

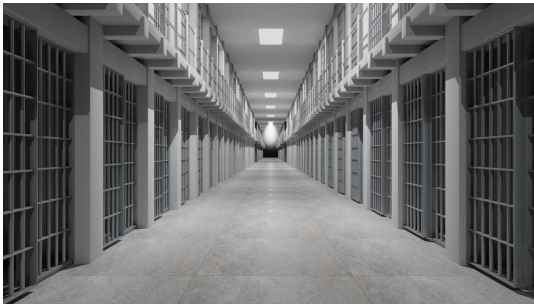
Since thought is basically who we are, there is no escape.

We have to realize that the duality of life, held in place by thought, is a self-referencing piece of code, a Moebius strip

with only one side, not two. There are no methods that work. There are no truths that set us free. Escape tunnels surface back within the walls of the prison complex.

[Core statement]:

If we think we can become free of thought, and thus of suffering, we are thinking. And thinking is the prison.

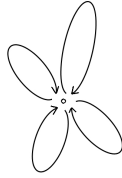


Word to the reader:

We must end on this gloomy note. Offering false hope is the perennial strategy of thought to ensure its own survival. Not our survival, but thought's. If you made it thus far in these pages, you have begun to understand this, if reluctantly.

You cannot beat the Game of Thinking, but you can sidestep it and acquire less thought.

Unless you do, you are in the most literal sense food for thought.



BONUS CHAPTER: RELIGION

[Core statement]:

Religion was the first manifestation of thought.

Everything that can be said about the influence of thought on human history, can also be said about religion. This may seem an odd comparison. It isn't. The authoritative clamp that religious ideas have exercised, and still do, on the minds of people, is identical to the reign of thought. Religion is the oldest expression of thought, but not the last or only one.

The connection between thought and religion is not to be found in nuanced details of doctrine or in isolated anecdotes. The connection exists in the core principles at the heart of faith.

The foremost of these is: the existence of God. Or gods. Or any other form of higher power. The basic tenet is that we, humans, stand in a subservient relationship to an invisible but all-powerful entity, who decides about good luck and bad, health and wealth, who created the world, and who rewards the faithful in this life or the next.

An atheist will scoff and dismiss such belief as fabrication, delusion, or at best a gullible form of ignorance. Unfortunately, this fails to explain the astounding grip that various world religions, big and small, have had on people and to this day continue to have.

The number one tenet is God. The belief can be traced back to individuals experiencing a communication from a supernatural power. The founding fathers always had a direct encounter with such a being, which called himself any number of names, from Allah, Jehovah, Jesus, to more abstracted versions like I Am That I Am, the Creator, Elohim, the Source. The main point is that religion starts as an experience; not as a thought, not as a tradition, not as a moral system, not as a story told by elders.

Figures like Abraham in the Old Testament, or Mohammed in the Quran, or Gautama Buddha, are too distant in time and too distorted in sources, to be reliable examples. The contemporaneous evidence for Jesus is so thin he might not even have been a historical person. In order to have a shot at understanding how a rational human being can be pulled into an irrational religious mind sphere, we need a more accessible, documented and relatively recent source.

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) is one such source. He kept daily notes, posthumously published as his *Dream Diary* (1743-1744) and his *Spiritual Diary* (1747-1765). He wrote letters throughout his lifetime, and his contemporaries have documented his public behavior and actions. He definitely qualified as a rational, educated, balanced individual. He was

a scientist, engineer, politician, author, traveler and nobleman. In his fifties he started seeing dreams and visions that disturbed him greatly. These culminated when he was having dinner in a London pub. The room went suddenly dark and he saw snakes and frogs crawling on the floor. A man who looked like a shadow sat across the room and stared at him. Then, inexplicably, Swedenborg realized he was in the presence of Jesus Christ. He simply “knew” this. The dark man followed him home to his apartment and began dictating a new Christian theology.

The change in his life was so dramatic that Swedenborg kept it secret and initially wrote anonymously. He proceeded over the next 25 years to publish some 30 volumes in which lucid intellectual discourse alternated with well-written but unbalanced visions and stories of otherworldly experiences. His previous scientific work was relegated to the dustbin.

The number one religious tenet, the existence of God, was for Swedenborg not an idea or a belief. He had met God, he thought. He did not need to believe in God, since he was in regular contact with him, just like Moses. His thoughts had acquired a new source, God. Therefore, no probing questions were asked, no doubts were raised, no scientific research was done, nothing was verified. An absolute certainty shines through in his writings and is taken to be the explanation for their subsequent influence on other thinkers and authors, like Henry James and William Blake. However, with what we now know about thought, this explanation is weak.

The reason Swedenborg, the Bible and similar scriptures, are able to convince readers of their truth, is that the thought fields or entities that gave birth to the books gain access to

the reader's mind, even centuries later. Thought is memetic. It has a life of its own.

[Core statement]:

We do not read an author; we read thought.

Swedenborg is only one example of the thousands to whom something like this happened. It continues to this day, with people like Helen Schucman (author of *A Course in Miracles*), Neale Donald Walsch (author of *Conversations with God*), Jane Roberts (author of the *Seth* books), and others. Thought, the voice in our head, is enhanced, taken over by an outside entity who identifies himself as God or other divine agent.

The reason we have a hard time accepting this, is that we think of thought as ours, as us, as an inside entity which is normal, sane, trustworthy, and cannot be taken over. This is a false assumption, as pointed out many times already.

[Core statement]:

Thought is an external entity that comes into us and takes over, on a daily basis, constantly. We are so used to it that we think we ourselves think.

Thought establishes its presence during the growing-up period, culminating in the teenage years. This is why teenagers turn into smartasses from one day to the next. They suddenly have "a mind of their own," as we say. Except it isn't their own.

The fundamental thesis of the current book is that we are not in charge of our minds. Religion is merely a corroborating

phenomenon. If taken literally, after all, religious doctrine states this fact outright: God is the master, the one in charge.

This supremely logical approach does not, as we might expect, undermine religion. Quite the opposite. The source of religion is as real as the source of thought itself. In other words, God exists. It's just that he is not what he seems. He is not what and who he wants us to believe he is.

Religion has caused massive suffering, damage, distortions, and abuse of power. In August 2018 a story broke on the news that more than 1,000 children had been sexually abused by over 300 Catholic priests in the state of Pennsylvania alone. A detailed grand jury report was released, showing that the church at all levels had been complicit in enacting and covering up these crimes.

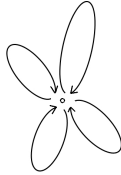
Despite revelations like these, incredibly, people still believe in God, in the Pope, still respect their priest, still donate money, and still refuse to make the connection between the religious teachings and the demonstrated misconduct. The awful consequences of religion are not the result of a pure doctrine that was misappropriated and misused by a few bad people. Rather, the heart of religion is itself a deliberate misuse of power, enslaving people from the inside out.

[Core statement]:

God has used thought as a platform. Equally true is that thought has used God as a platform.

[Core statement]:

The reason that religion affects billions of people, is that thought affects all of us.



BONUS CHAPTER: ECONOMICS

How we deal with money exemplifies our thought-induced behavioral irrationality.

Money often, maybe always, weighs in when decisions get made. Money has a voice of its own. As they say, money talks. More accurately, money thinks.

Richard Thaler, in his book *Misbehaving* (2015), points out the discrepancy between straightforward rational decision making when it comes to money, as dictated by economic optimization theory, and the actual behavior, or misbehavior, of people. It is as if we do things that we ourselves think are dumb. This, of course, pretty much reflects our life experience.

Thaler models this irrational economical behavior in an effort to explain and predict it. Each of the explanations is a display case of thought making us do things that only make sense in

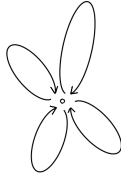
the moment; like buying a bed spread that is 2 feet larger on all sides than the bed it is intended for, causing the spread to pool on the floor, just because it was on discount.

Thought is rational only when we sit down and think about it. In all other situations thought is impulsive, illogical, dumb. Economics is governed by this latter behavior. It is thought in action on a national scale.

Thaler, who won the Nobel Prize for economics in 2017, created an explanatory model that manages to capture and tame the buying and spending patterns of non-optimized people. The model enables thought to shine. The result feels reassuring and satisfying. Thus the Nobel Prize.

The current study recognizes that we do not tame thought; it tames us. That is why this book is neither reassuring nor satisfying.

Our economic misbehavior, when we spend money in silly ways or do everything we can to avoid losses that don't exist, occurs because we are not in charge of our own mind. An explanatory model makes us believe we are. But we are not.



BONUS CHAPTER: A QUESTION POSTPONED

How on earth is it possible that we don't think our own thoughts?

This question has to be asked sooner or later. We have to zoom out, not only from thinking, but from the observation of thinking.

In multiple indirect ways the question has been addressed in the current book. But because our method of research is styled on the petal leaf diagram, the question has never been explored to the extent that contact with the starting point was lost. The lack of an explanatory model turns up as the lack of an answer.

Let us draft the outlines of a series of severe deviations from target, all of which we risk landing up in.

The question is: if we don't think, who does, or what does? Do we live in a matrix, an artificial reality? Is our brain a

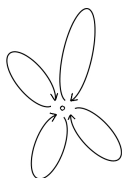
thought receiver? If so, where do thoughts come from? Is an alien intelligence, alien as in *extraterrestrial*, using our minds on a massive scale? Are we in varying degrees possessed by demons and spirits? Are thoughts transmitted from the stars and decoded by our nervous system, through some form of quantum entanglement that bypasses the restraints of the speed of light? Why is this happening, if it is? Is our mind the result of genetic manipulations carried out on upright monkeys 100,000 years ago? Are we those monkeys? And so on...

There is no profit in pursuing these questions, given a lack of direct evidence. The only direct evidence we have is the fact of thinking.

The reason that avoiding these questions feels like a show stopper, a party pooper, is that thought was hoping we would pursue some crazy theory or another, and eventually buy into it to such a degree that it becomes a belief. That way thought wins.

[Core statement]:

The abstract goal of freedom is only achieved by glitching the Game of Thinking, gaming it, escaping it, outsmarting it without using thought itself.



CLOSING CHAPTER: SUMMARY OF CLUES

This book contains a multitude of clues, heavily wrapped in language and thought. To allow you a run at unwrapping them, they are compiled here as core statements, listed in the order they appear in the text.

Tackling the world

Thinking is a fact; everything else is theory.

The secret is that life at all times offers three options, not two.

The world doesn't leave us alone, because it is us.

Thought exists in multiple dimensions. We, human beings, are one of those dimensions.

Thought has no identity. We have.

A thought is not true. Truth is a thought.

Will

If we stop thought, we think nothing. If we stop
the will, we want nothing.

No matter how many great thoughts we think,
we are still trapped in thought.

Thought, somehow, manages to stress us out.

First we believe because we think. Then we
believe because we now want to.

Thought doesn't care what we believe, as long
as we think.

Thought wants us to think. If that was not true,
we would be able to stop thinking. But we are
not.

Escape

We are not our thoughts; therefore we are not our understanding.

Thinking is a merciless weight. When we feel that weight, we understand the need for escape. When we accept thought the way it is, the idea of escape makes no sense whatsoever.

The fact that we are so deeply convinced of our own importance, is undeniable evidence that we do not think our own thoughts.

Thought is superior; we identify; ergo we feel superior.

Thoughts are like zombies. One on one we can deal with them. When they come in bunches, we go under.

We can game the Game of Thinking.

To stop thinking changes something in the world.

Thinking changes nothing. Not thinking changes something.

Mental Genetics

Change changes nothing. Yet the thought, or meme,
of change persists.

We think that by thinking we can change ourselves
and thus the world. In reality thinking maintains the
world as it is.

Some thoughts are more powerful than the people
who think them.

In order for war to stop, people need to do more
than lay down their weapons; they need to lay
down their thoughts.

We are our thoughts, is what thought has convinced
us of.

Explanatory models are never true, no matter how
true they are.

Our thinking process runs our lives, yet we do not
control it, create it, or guide it. Nor can we switch it
off.

We do not think because we live; we live because
we think.

The core of this study focuses on thought as an
entity that, remarkably, is foreign to us. The more
we study thought, the more foreign it becomes.

Since a system of knowledge, in whatever field, is per definition an extended deviation from target, every system is wrong. Not just after extensive road testing, but wrong from the start.

Standing Still

Thinking is not an ability; it is a disability.

We have the option of holding nothing, rather than
holding thought.

The Game of Thinking refers to thought, not to us.
Thought plays the game. For us it's not a game. For
us it's life or death.

We come to a point of recognizing that what we
know, we don't know.

Thought assembles the world. Not atom by atom,
but thought by thought.

Cleverness is thought having a blast.

A debate is a cocktail party for thought. A heated
debate is the same but with a lot more cocktails.

For it to be real, freedom has to not be a thought.

Even when we don't think, thinking is going on. We
are surrounded by thought, yet not necessarily
plugged into the stream.

Words on a page are thoughts that have come to a
complete stop.

Thinking in order to think better is equivalent to
becoming a better hamster inside a hamster wheel
inside a cage.

Thinking isn't a solution; it is a problem.

Non-thinking isn't a solution either; it is a must.

Religion is interesting. But in the context of searching for freedom from thought, it is interesting the way a horror movie is: sickly fascinating, frightening, dark.

The Internal Dialogue

When we are talking to ourselves, we are not talking to
ourselves.

We unthinkingly think. Thinking has such a hold over us
that it proceeds in us with or without our awareness.

Observing thought has little or no influence on thought.
Observing that we are observing thought, stops it.

The battle between thought and self-awareness is won
by thought, historically and relentlessly and hands down.

We are most of the time unaware that we are locked in
inner conversation or immersed in a head movie as we
go through the day. But we are. We call it thinking.

It will have come to the attention of most rational
people that the world is run by madmen. It is. The
madmen, however, are other rational people.

The internal dialogue engages *us*; we do not engage *it*.

We can think we are in charge of ourselves, but thinking
is in charge no matter what we think. Thinking is in
charge *because* we think.

Acquiring Less Thought

The more self-less a person is, the more he is not.

Our problems are problems because they are our own.
Other people's problems barely touch us.

Acquiring less thought is a way of taking on thought by avoiding its already established battle fields, where it finds easy victory.

By acquiring more thought, thought acquires you. By acquiring less thought, you acquire you.

The salesman of less thought has empty shelves and no customers.

The world is defined by thought; not thought by the world.

Perception can be spread among a group of people. It is not caused by an event; it causes the event.

We do not lack explanations. We do not lack thought. We lack the freedom to step outside of explanations, outside of thought.

We do not live in the matrix; it lives in us.

We cannot master thought; it already is our master, and has been for thousands of years.

Though we cannot master thought, we may be able to slip through its cracks. Acquiring less thought is one of those cracks.

We cannot get away from thinking. The land of
thinking is inhabited by our problems.

Before there was global cell phone coverage, there
was global thought coverage.

Although artificial, thought is not man-made.

We do not need more thought. We need to acquire
less thought.

We underestimate thought. The reason is that we
don't see thought. We see only ourselves, doing the
thinking. By acquiring less thought, we get to see
thought for what it is.

Thought treats us the same way a teenager treats
his skateboard in the skate park. It rides us until we
break.

We think thought is a tool we use in life. It is the
other way around. We are a tool thought uses.

Acquiring less thought is a rope ladder, and thought
is a very, very high wall.

The greatest victory of thought is its success at getting us
to believe in right or wrong, true or false, good or bad.
We suffer from morality. We suffer from truth. We suffer
from authority.

A compromise is not a third option. It is not a way out. It is a mix-up, a muddying of the waters.

Thought likes to lull us into a false sense of inspiration.

Truth given away is truth that won't be found.

Thought gives itself away to us. It is there all the time and thus invisible.

Zooming Out of the System

Systems of knowledge, especially when fervently adopted, become systems of ignorance.

When we think we have found the answer, we most certainly have not.

If we stop thinking, we stop suffering. Even bodily pain only becomes suffering when we think about it.

We don't know what awareness is, yet we know exactly what it is.

The more we think, the less we are aware. The more we are aware, the less we think.

Since thought diminishes when we become intensely aware of it, awareness doesn't feel like "us." It feels impersonal.

We think, therefore we are (who we are). We are aware, therefore we no longer are (who we are).

The assumption that we are constantly aware, is utterly and totally untrue.

Changing thought is not a way out. A changed, improved, accelerated thought is still a thought. Awareness, however, is not a thought.

Awareness can proceed without thinking. Thinking can proceed without awareness.

We have to avoid elevating awareness to the level of a concept. It cannot be studied, because it is the thing that studies.

Awareness makes it possible to ask, you think you think, but do you? Without it, we'd just think.

Awareness makes it possible to not think. Without it, not thinking would be a state of unconsciousness. In fact, without it, thinking itself would be a state of unconsciousness.

People think without being aware of doing so. People think without knowing that they're thinking.

Learning to think better about not thinking, is self-defeating.

The more we think about non-thinking, the more we think.

We value knowledge that does not help us figure out life. We dismiss knowledge that prods us to do just that.

We believe in thought more deeply, more irrevocably, more passionately than any holy man or woman ever believed in God.

The strength of our belief in matters we don't actually know, is an indicator of the independent power thought has over us.

We are not our thoughts, but we sure think so.

It is impossible to question a belief without stopping thought in its tracks. This is why so many beliefs go unquestioned.

Although friendly and useful thoughts have certainly been spotted in the wild, generally thoughts are not our friends.

To try and not think about a problem is self-defeating. To try and not think at all, might work.

That we think is far more essential, critical, and amazing than *what* we think.

That we think, matters; *what* we think, matters not at all.

Reality

While we may be convinced that the world of daily objects is real, thought only recognizes thought as real. One of those thoughts is that the world is real.

Our opinions, passions, beliefs, behavioral codes are not the problem. Thought itself is.

We are prisoners of thought. We call that situation reality.

The thing about reality is that we can't get rid of it. The more we think about it, the more of it comes into being.

Thought holds reality in place.

The "I" in "I think" is completely accidental.

Thought does not guide us, especially not when it pretends to.

Guidance is one of the ways thought gets us to think more.

The moment we think we know, we don't.

The reason the edge of thought is called an edge, is that thought ceases when we get there.

Thought stops at the same place it starts.

Not thinking is not a concept. It simply means
to not think.

We think we are blessed by thought, when it is the
fact of thinking that accounts for all strife and
suffering.

Answers sell; questions don't.

The search for answers is thought searching for loot,
food, and growth opportunities. Thought's growth,
not ours.

Thought loves bullshit. It loves bullshit for the same
reason that plants do: it makes them grow.

You can ask what time it is, but you cannot ask
whether the watch is on time.

Reality isn't so much a philosophical concept as it is
a pain in the ass.

Our concept of reality is like a two-legged chair. You
can sit on it, but don't lean back.

Thought is real; reality isn't.

We exist inside a Game of Thinking. We call it the
universe, life, reality. But it is the Game of Thinking,
a game not played by us, but by thought.

The Game of Thinking is real; reality isn't.

Thinking is a game and reality is the landscape in which it
is played.

Thought, contrary to popular opinion, is not a necessity.

It is necessary to live to think, but it is not necessary to think to live.

Reality expands when thought shrinks.

The more we think, the less what we think matters.

We have no defense against thinking.

We exist in a world.

Thought creates a focal point through which the rays of reality get combined into the world as we know it.

If it can be done once, it can be done.

Our reality isn't things. It is thoughts and feelings.

We don't see things; we only see their likable or unlikable aspects.

The Crux of the Matter

There are more thoughts than there are people. As a result we all feel a little overstuffed.

The solution to thinking is to empty ourselves of it.

The fact of breathing means air is already inside us. The fact of thinking means thought is already inside us.

Thought is not human.

Thought gets instant and continual reward out of thinking.

It stands to reason that if thought cannot get its instant and continual reward, if it cannot squeeze it out of us, then it will leave us alone.

It is necessary to think. What is not necessary is to think all the time.

Thought needs human thinking, but it does not need yours or mine specifically.

A prisoner who doesn't feel motivated to escape, won't.

Since thought is basically who we are, there is no escape.

If we think we can become free of thought, and thus of suffering, we are thinking. And thinking is the prison.

Religion

Religion was the first manifestation of thought.

We do not read an author; we read thought.

Thought is an external entity that comes into us and takes over, on a daily basis, constantly. We are so used to it that we think we ourselves think.

God has used thought as a platform. Equally true is that thought has used God as a platform.

The reason that religion affects billions of people, is that thought affects all of us.

A Question Postponed

The abstract goal of freedom is only achieved by glitching the Game of Thinking, gaming it, escaping it, outsmarting it without using thought itself.

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